DEATH TAKES A HOLIDAY

A Comedy in Three Acts

BY

WALTER FERRIS

BASED ON A PLAY OF THE SAME TITLE

BY

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"Death Takes a Holiday" was first produced by Lee Shubert, on December 26, 1929, at the Ethel Barrymore Theatre in New York City. The play was directed by Lawrence Marston, the settings were designed by Rollo Wayne, and the cast was as follows:

Cora ..... *Florence Golden*
Fedele ..... *Thomas Bate*
Duke Lambert ..... *James Dale*
Alda ..... *Ann Orr*
Duchess Stephanie ..... *Olga Birkbeck*
Princess of San Luca ..... *Viva Birkett*
Baron Cesarea ..... *Wallace Erskine*
Rhoda Fenton ..... *Lenore Sorsby*
Eric Fenton ..... *Roland Bottomley*
Corrado ..... *Martin Burton*
Grazia ..... *Rose Hobart*
His Serene Highness, Prince Sirki, of Vitalba Alexandri ..... *Philip Merivale*
Major Whitread ..... *Frank Greene*

ACT I

The Great Hall in the Castle of Duke Lambert.
Late evening in October.

ACT II

The same. Three nights later.

ACT III

The same. Eleven-thirty, the same night.

ACT ONE

ACT ONE

Scene: Great Hall in DUKE LAMBERT'S *Castle in Italy. The ceiling is high and the stage is so arranged that it gives the impression of a large room. At the rear are three French windows opening on to a garden in which are cypress trees, rose bushes and other luxuriant foliage. To the left of the French windows is a stand on which there is a bowl of roses. There are three steps leading from the Great Hall to the garden. At the top of these, at the left, is a small marble bench. On the stage at the right is a large fireplace. Just in front of this a table and two chairs. To the rear of the fireplace, a door. At the left a divan without a back. Left rear a buffet on which are decanters and glasses. The door left, wide and arched, leads to the reception rooms. Left, rear, a stairway.*

Time: Eleven thirty at night, late October.

At Rise: The stage is empty and dimly lighted. A dark shadow crosses the garden which is flooded with moonlight. The passing of the shadow is repeated two or three times. Enter CORA, *a maid.*

CORA

Fedele, Fedele. (FEDELE *enters from right.*) They're here.

FEDELE

Yes I know. The Duke's had an accident.

CORA

A bad one?

FEDELE

It couldn't be. His car's still running. The lodge keeper telephoned.

CORA

Racing with his son, I suppose. I'm always afraid Corrado will have one, driving like that.

FEDELE

It isn't like the Duke. He takes care of himself.

CORA (*looking out into the garden*)

It's a queer night. Are those shadows or clouds driving across the moon?

FEDELE

Clouds, of course.

[*Voices are heard off.* FEDELE *switches on the lights and he and* CORA *stand on either side of the French windows. Enter* ALDA *and the* DUKE.

[ALDA *is a woman of twenty-eight, slender, beautiful, whose manner suggests a restrained restlessness and hunger. It is blasé, with unsatisfied emotion playing beneath it. The* DUKE *is a fair man, of forty-five, with an air of good health and good breeding.*

[FEDELE *and* CORA *take their wraps and go out.*

DUKE

What a night!

ALDA

We're all a little mad, aren't we? (*Declaiming.*) The moon, the moon's to blame.

DUKE

It's been doing some very odd tricks.
(*He glances back toward the garden where a dark shadow seems to cross. He is startled and speaks suddenly.*)
Alda . . . look!

ALDA

What is it?

DUKE

A shadow. Don't you see?

ALDA

Yes.

DUKE

It's like the one we saw on the road, just before we struck.
It is. . . . (*She laughs and turns away.*) We're letting our imaginations run riot tonight. It's just a cloud passing over the moon.
[*She sits on the divan.*

DUKE

Yes, of course it is. Silly of me to be startled. I must

be a bit nervy. (*Crosses to table and takes cigarette.*) Sure you're all right?

ALDA

Quite. I'm not even shaken. I suppose a proper woman would be in hysterics.

DUKE

Your nerve is magnificent.

[ALDA *sits and lights a cigarette then looks up.*

ALDA

Do you know . . . for just an instant I hoped we *would* crash.

DUKE

Good lord . . . why?

ALDA

I don't know. Perhaps I wanted a thrill . . . At least I'm sure it wasn't courage.

DUKE

Well, my dear, we've had glimpses of deep water tonight, and I don't like it.

[ALDA *gives him a brief smile. She is evidently puzzling over something.*

ALDA

Do you know, there seemed to be something desirable beyond that crash . . . I had a curious glimpse of it.

DUKE

Come, come. We must shake this off. I suggest a whiskey and soda.

[*He goes to the buffet.*

ALDA (*curiously*)

Didn't you feel anything?

DUKE

I felt a very healthy sense of fear, and a touch of conscience at risking your life.

ALDA

Nothing else?

DUKE

Well, if I did, I'm not going to talk about it. (*He comes down to* ALDA.) You'd better fall in love, my dear. Then you won't be worrying about small thrills.

ALDA

I wish I could!

[*Enter* STEPHANIE, *wife of the* DUKE, *the* PRINCESS *of* SAN LUCCA, *and* BARON CESAREA.

[STEPHANIE *is a dark, rather mysterious looking woman of forty, with a rich husky voice.*

[*The Princess is a fair, sweet woman, maternal and solicitous.*

[BARON CESAREA *is bluff and red-cheeked, at seventy-five, with a merry eye.*

STEPHANIE

Lambert . . . I'm so glad to see you!

DUKE

Why, dear?

STEPHANIE

I've been troubled all the way.

PRINCESS

So have I. Have the children come in?

DUKE

They've gone around the lake, I think. We were trying to keep up, but lost them.

BARON

You go too fast. Everybody goes too fast. None of you will live as long as I have. Be used up, the lot of you.

ALDA

You went the pace in your day, dear. You might give us our turn.

BARON

Humph!—. Perhaps I did. But I don't know why I follow you children about like this. Youngsters, all of you.

PRINCESS

It's refreshing to be called a youngster with Grazia eighteen.

STEPHANIE

And Corrado twenty-two.

DUKE

As for Alda . . . she's about eighteen herself tonight. And I . . .

BARON

You're ageless. All dilletantï are. Youth doesn't

know the value of things. Life goes slower with me. Slower every day. I can look at it. By and by, when things stop altogether and I slip through, perhaps I'll know what it's all about. What silly youngsters you'll all seem then.

ALDA

You're not to talk like that. You've got to stay here and be my balance wheel.

BARON

You need one, you naughty girl.

[*She goes to him and takes his arm. They walk toward the garden.*

DUKE (*to* PRINCESS)

He adores her. His dead son was Alda's husband, you know.

PRINCESS

How touching!

DUKE

It's the one thing that keeps the old boy going.

STEPHANIE

It's the one thing that keeps us all going, isn't it?

[*Enter* RHODA FENTON, *a handsome straightforward English girl of twenty-four,* CORRADO, *son of the* DUKE *and* STEPHANIE, *a dark, beautifully mannered man of twenty-two, with a lightly dissipated face, and* ERIC FENTON, *a tall, intelligent-looking Englishman. They enter laughing and talking.* CORA *and* FEDELE *enter and take their wraps and exeunt.*

RHODA

Oh, what a drive! Has my hair gone white, anybody?

ERIC

Not yet, but it probably will. It always happens between twelve and five.

CORRADO (*he goes to his father*)

Are you all right, sir?

DUKE

Quite all right, old fellow.

CORRADO

The lodge keeper said you'd had an accident. I nearly turned over myself. It was a near thing.

RHODA

Near! We flirted with a coroner's inquest, and passed on.

ERIC

I haven't gone so hot and cold since the war.

DUKE

How did it happen?

CORRADO

I don't know. My lights must be out of order. There was a curious shadow in front of me and I didn't see the cart at all.

DUKE

A shadow? That's odd.

CORRADO

Just that last second some instinct told me to swerve.

ERIC

And we made a slight parabola at seventy miles an hour on one most inadequate wheel.

RHODA

Yes with a fifty foot drop below—

ERIC

One inch more and all the king's horses and all the king's men couldn't have found the pieces.

PRINCESS

Oh, Corrado . . . with all these lives in your hands!

CORRADO

I'm sorry, Princess.

BARON (*comes down steps*)

They play with life easily, at his age.

DUKE (*shaking his head*)

Was Grazia frightened?

RHODA

She hardly knew what was going on.

BARON

Was she asleep, or drugged with moonlight?

RHODA

No, she wasn't asleep. Just dreaming.

DUKE

Where is Grazia now?

CORRADO

She stayed in the garden.

PRINCESS (*to* CORRADO)

I wish you wouldn't drive like that with my little girl.

CORRADO

I'm sorry, Princess. I was distraught tonight.

BARON

Distraught . . . humph . . . I've *had* my life, and one year more or less doesn't matter, but you're just beginning. What is it, don't you care about living?

RHODA

I adore it.

CORRADO

I care about Grazia's life.

BARON

You don't act like it. If life's good why gamble with it?

RHODA

It was Grazia. Corrado couldn't go fast enough.

ERIC (*lightly*)

I believe her exact remark was that if we *did* go fast enough we might reach the illimitable, whatever that is.

BARON

Humph . . . you nearly made the discovery.

DUKE

Well, I don't know that Corrado was altogether to blame. As a matter of fact I didn't see that cart either. I hit it.

CORRADO (*quickly*)

You did?

STEPHANIE

Lambert!

DUKE

Don't be alarmed, my dear. An extraordinary escape! Even the car is hardly scratched.

ALDA

The driver must have traveled fifty feet through the air. (*She laughs.*) He went flapping through the moonlight like a great crow.

ERIC

Toward the illimitable?

DUKE (*laughing*)

And he looked so astonished when we reached him. He must have thought he was in heaven and Alda was a beautiful angel.

BARON

Humph! Quite right, quite right.

ERIC

Quite.

ALDA

Grazie, Signori!

CORRADO

Was the driver hurt?

DUKE

Winded a little. Nothing more.

CORRADO

But I don't understand it. We ought all to have been killed!

DUKE (*in an odd tone*)

Neither do I. It's too near the miraculous for my simple mind.

CORRADO

I think I need a drink.

ERIC

So do I.

[*He crosses to buffet.*

BARON (*rising and going to buffet*)

I could do with a little stimulant myself.

CORRADO

How about you, Rhoda?

RHODA

Yes, I'll have a spot.

CORRADO

Princess? You Mother?

[*The* PRINCESS *shakes her head.*

STEPHANIE

No thanks.

ERIC

Well, happy days.
[*He lifts his glass.*

BARON

And a beautiful woman to love.

CORRADO

And a beautiful woman to love *us*. It's not much good without that. (*Pause. He comes down.*) You know, I'm wondering . . . if our cart driver *had* broken his neck . . . I mean, what do you suppose comes after? . . . Where could he be now?

BARON

It might be well to give that a little attention if you're going to keep up this speed.

STEPHANIE (*lightly*)

The poor carter would be gathered into the heart of God.

ALDA

Yes, but where . . . Olympus, the Elysian fields, . . . the Pearly Gates?

ERIC (*smiling*)

I fancy he would be driving a superb team of mules down a perfect road, with a barrel of wine and an amiable wife waiting at the end. . . . That is, if he could choose. . . . All ideas of heaven are really wish-images, aren't they?

DUKE

In that case a woman would look forward to a perfectly appointed boudoir, and the entrance of a perfectly satisfactory lover.

ALDA

How well you know us.

BARON

Ha . . . sounds like *my* entrance.

ALDA

Have you a lurid past, dear?

BARON

I've lived harder than any of you. We knew how, in my time.

ALDA (*smiling*)

And were you a tremendous lover?

BARON (*pleased*)

Five beautiful creatures depended on me, all at one time, for their pleasure . . . and profit.

DUKE

Good Lord! Think of the fatigue!

BARON

And I kept them all happy, too. No one's man enough for that, nowadays.

CORRADO (*to* RHODA)

This is no place for a young girl, Rhoda. Shall we dance?

RHODA (*rises*)

I'd love to.

[*Exeunt* RHODA *and* CORRADO.

ALDA (*to* BARON)

Oughtn't you go to bed, darling?

BARON (*rising*)

Bed? Certainly not. I'm feeling younger, I don't know why.

ALDA

I think you ought to go. It's been a tiring day.

BARON

So it has. Dashing about all over the place. Felt about eighty-seven at dinner time. Thought I wouldn't last much longer. Now I'm about sixty.

ERIC

It's a gay tune. . . . You're not too tired?

ALDA

Never.

[*They exeunt.*

BARON (*as they move away*)

That's right, burn up your youth. You've got plenty of it.

CORRADO (*entering*)

Has Grazia come in yet?

PRINCESS

No, I wish she would.

DUKE

She's quite safe in the garden, Marie.

PRINCESS

Yes, of course. But I'm so . . . shaken, tonight.

STEPHANIE

She has many friends, but she's a lonely child.

DUKE

She seems too gentle and lovely to be real, sometimes.

PRINCESS

I wish she were like other children. I've tried to bring her up to be sensible, but it's so difficult to make an impression.

DUKE (*smiling*)

She just fades, if things aren't pleasant. I've seen her.

PRINCESS

Yes, she simply doesn't hear.

DUKE

It's a very normal and alert little mind.

PRINCESS

But such a dreamy one.

BARON

Marry her off. Nothing like marriage to spoil your dreaming.

CORRADO (*crossing up to steps*)

Thanks Baron. I'm the prospective bridegroom, you know.

(GRAZIA *enters from garden.* CORRADO *rushes up to her. She is a lovely girl of eighteen, charming and gentle, but oddly remote.*)
Grazia. . . .

DUKE

Ah . . . here's our little dreamer.

STEPHANIE

Bringing the moonlight with her.

PRINCESS

Darling, are you all right?

GRAZIA

Of course, Mother dear.

PRINCESS

I was so frightened when I heard of your accident.

GRAZIA

But we had no accident, did we Corrado?

CORRADO

No, dear, but we just escaped one. I'm so sorry I ran that risk.

GRAZIA

But I like going fast. It feels like wings.

PRINCESS

But you never will again, will you, Corrado?

CORRADO

No. I've had my lesson tonight.

DUKE

Were there any elves in the garden, to entertain you, my darling?

[GRAZIA *gives him a brief, intimate smile.*

GRAZIA

There may have been. . . . It's the strangest night I've ever known. Didn't you feel it? All the time on the drive there were shadows running over the fields. And yet there weren't any clouds in the sky to make shadows. Didn't you notice?

DUKE (*startled*)

By Jove . . . there weren't.

PRINCESS

It was just your imagination, Grazia.

GRAZIA (*as though not hearing*)

I had forgotten how silent and swift a shadow can be. I felt as though there were wings somewhere about. And we seemed to be flying, too.

PRINCESS

Don't, Grazia. You disturb me when you talk like that.

DUKE

Now, we think you've been free quite long enough. When are you going to fold your wings and be my little daughter-in-law?

[GRAZIA *sits on divan.*

CORRADO

Father's going to build us a villa in the woods, just at the top of the cliff, Grazia.

GRAZIA

How nice. It's lovely there. (*She gives the* DUKE *a charming smile.*) Thank you, sir.

DUKE (*gently*)

I would do anything for you, my dear.

BARON

Better clip her wings, if she's going to live up there.

STEPHANIE

Love will bind her, my friend.

PRINCESS (*sitting on divan*)

And children.

CORRADO

Won't you make it next month, Grazia? I'm so impatient.

DUKE

Won't you, dear?

PRINCESS

We could be quite ready in a month.

GRAZIA (*slowly*)

I wish I could . . . but . . .

CORRADO

We could spend the winter on the Riviera, and in Egypt and Greece. You know how much you want to see the Ægean Isles.

BARON

See things while you're young and fresh. That's the time. They sink in then.

DUKE

It's only a question of making up your mind, my darling.

[GRAZIA *turns and looks at them as if slightly puzzled.*

GRAZIA (*rises*)

You know I love you all, and want to please you. But don't you see, I'm not ready.

CORRADO

But why, Grazia?

GRAZIA (*slowly as though searching her thoughts*)

That life is too . . . There's a kind of happiness I want to find first, if I can.

CORRADO (*desperately*)

Aren't you happy with me?

GRAZIA

Yes dear . . . but that isn't quite what I mean. (*She looks at them helplessly.*) I wish I knew how to tell you. (*She turns toward the garden.*) There is something out there . . . which I must find first.

[*She begins to walk to the steps.*

CORRADO

May I come with you?

GRAZIA (*gently*)

I'd rather be alone, if you don't mind.

[*She goes into the garden, leaving a constrained silence behind her, which the* BARON *breaks.*

BARON

Leave the child alone. Life will tame her fast enough.

STEPHANIE (*rises*)

Shadows running!

DUKE (*rises*)

I know what she meant. I saw them, myself.

BARON (*going to the* PRINCESS)

Well, I believe I could do a bit of running myself, tonight. Funny, my legs are getting younger. (*He flexes one knee.*) That fellow ought to creak, but it doesn't. (*He leans over to the Princess.*) Marie, one who *was* about to die, salutes you, and asks the honor of a dance.

PRINCESS (*rising*)

Delightful. I remember when you led every ball.

BARON (*delighted, as they go off*)

Ha . . . I will again, if this keeps up. Amazing, isn't it? I didn't think I'd ever dance again.

STEPHANIE (*to* CORRADO *who is on the porch*)

Was it a bad evening for you, dear?

CORRADO (*comes down the steps*)

She's so utterly lovely.

STEPHANIE

Yes . . . and so delicate . . . so fine. . . . But you will win her . . . if . . .

CORRADO (*impatiently*)

If I turn saint, and deny every human impulse. If I live only in music and poetry. . . .

STEPHANIE

But love *is* music . . . and love *is* poetry. . . .

CORRADO

But one can't live like an anchorite, on nothing but beauty. For instance, one occasionally wants a drink. . . . Tonight I'd like a dozen, after what I've been through.

STEPHANIE

You will never reach her that way.

CORRADO (*desperately*)

I know it. I can hardly ever reach her. She's so pure and remote. . . . And I'm a human being.

STEPHANIE

You must be very careful, dear, not to frighten her. She loves you, I'm sure. . . .

CORRADO (*going to her*)

And I love her till I'm half mad with it. But it's no good cursing, is it? Sing something, Mother. It might bring her in from the garden.

[*The telephone rings. The* DUKE *answers.*

[*Exit* CORRADO

[ERIC *enters.*

DUKE

Yes . . . ? Really. . . . How very strange! Is she

actually out of danger? But that seems impossible! Thank your mistress for the message and tell her I am much moved.

[*Enter* ALDA.

STEPHANIE

Is it Selma?

DUKE (*astonished*)

The butler says she's apparently well. She's taken food, and wants to get up.

STEPHANIE

But I thought she was dying!

DUKE

She was. The doctor said she wouldn't live through the night. Apparently the All-soul wasn't ready for her, either.

STEPHANIE

There is some meaning in all this.

DUKE

Yes. . . . And I don't feel at home in the age of miracles. (*To* STEPHANIE.) We must tell the Princess.

[*Exeunt* STEPHANIE *and the* DUKE. ERIC, *looking distrait, goes and picks up the glass which he set down before.* ALDA, *after a moment, follows him.*

ALDA

What's the matter, my dear?

ERIC

You.

ALDA

Don't bother about me, Eric. I should only disappoint you.

ERIC

Why should you disappoint me?

ALDA

I'm too restless for marriage. Besides, I've had that.

ERIC

What *do* you want, then?

ALDA

I don't know . . . something overpowering . . . I want to be swept away . . . mastered. . . .

ERIC (*ironically*)

Sorry, if I'm not magnificent enough.

ALDA (*with a laugh*)

It isn't that. The trouble is I've known too much. I've drained sensation. . . .

ERIC

Well, I've been said to have my points as a lover.

ALDA (*smiling*)

Have you?

ERIC

There are several women who have found me . . . adequate. . . .

ALDA

I have no doubt. But now you'd like to settle down

in a charming country house, and breed healthy English children. Sorry, my dear, but that prospect doesn't amuse me.

ERIC (*fiercely*)

Alda . . . if you'll come out into the moonlight with me. . . .

ALDA

I think I won't put you to the test.

[*Enter the* PRINCESS *and* CORRADO.

PRINCESS

Grazia ought not to be out so late. She may not be warmly enough wrapped.

CORRADO

Shall I call her?

PRINCESS

Thanks, I wish you would.

[*As he starts rear, a loud shriek comes from the garden . . . high and full of terror. All stand fixed for a moment, then* CORRADO *bounds toward the rear windows as the rest of the guests crowd into the room.*

[GRAZIA, *her hair in disorder, her face convulsed with terror, appears in the central window. She screams again and looks back, as though unable to move.* CORRADO *reaches her.*

CORRADO

Grazia . . . what is it!

[*She is about to fall.* CORRADO *catches her.*

ERIC

What's happened.

ALDA

What is it? Oh, Grazia!

DUKE

Here, Corrado! . . .

[CORRADO *carries* GRAZIA, *moaning, to the couch. Her mother kneels beside her. . . .* GRAZIA *is hysterical with fear.*

PRINCESS

Grazia, Grazia!

DUKE

Stand back, give her a little air. Brandy, somebody!

[RHODA *brings a small glass of brandy and hands it to the* PRINCESS.

[ALL *in the group are questioning one another—* "What can it be?" *etc.*

PRINCESS

She can't take this yet. Smelling salts.

STEPHANIE (*calling*)

Cora, the smelling salts, quickly!

[CORA *exits and returns immediately with the salts which she hands to* STEPHANIE *who gives them to the* PRINCESS.

PRINCESS

Here, dear . . . Oh, please don't cry so!

GRAZIA (*shuddering*)

Don't let it . . . come in. . . .

ALL

We won't.

DUKE

Give her a little brandy.

RHODA

What do you supposed happened?

ALDA

Some prowler may have frightened her.

PRINCESS

Darling . . . can't you tell us?

BARON

She can hardly breathe. . . . A bad fright.

DUKE (*fiercely*)

If any one has harmed that lovely child! . . .

PRINCESS

Grazia . . . look at me . . . It's mother . . .
What frightened you?
[GRAZIA *only moans.*

ALDA

Did you fall asleep, and dream?

STEPHANIE

It is more than that.

PRINCESS

Drink some brandy, darling. (GRAZIA *sips brandy, shuddering.*) Now try to tell us what it was.

GRAZIA

I can't.

PRINCESS

Please, dear. . . . We must know.

[GRAZIA *is breathing with difficulty, her eyes wide and staring.*

GRAZIA

I . . . don't . . . know . . . what it was . . . There was something cold . . . and terrible . . . Oh, Mother.

[*She clings to her mother.* CORRADO *kneels before her.*

CORRADO (*huskily*)

It's all right, Grazia. You're safe, now.

GRAZIA (*after a moment*)

I was sitting by the fountain . . . watching the shadows . . . in the garden . . . dreaming. I could hear your voices . . . and the music . . . It was all so peaceful . . . and so beautiful . . . that I didn't want to come in . . . I thought . . . in a moment I am going to feel something important . . . some happiness. I felt a world about to open. . . . And then . . . Oh!

[*She shudders.*

PRINCESS

Go on, Grazia.

GRAZIA

And then . . . an icy wind seemed to touch me. . . . But it wasn't a wind, because all the leaves were still.

[*She pauses and shudders.*

CORRADO

Oh . . . Grazia!

GRAZIA (*more strongly*)

I felt some one behind me . . . running. There wasn't any sound . . . but I felt some one running. . . . And I saw . . .

[*She sits staring, wide-eyed, into the distance.*

DUKE (*sharply*)

What did you see?

GRAZIA (*convulsively*)

A . . . shadow . . . an enormous darkness. . . . And yet it wasn't a shadow, because I could see the sky and the moon through it. . . . (*Rising.*) Oh, Corrado!

[CORRADO *takes her into his arms.*

CORRADO

It's all right, Grazia.

PRINCESS

Quiet, dear.

[*She holds brandy to* GRAZIA's *lips again.*

BARON

The excitement's tired her. They go too fast.

ERIC

Is she apt to be hysterical?

PRINCESS

No, only very sensitive.

RHODA

Then what can it be?

DUKE

It was that ride, of course, and the danger. It's been working underneath.

GRAZIA

I felt something . . . cold!

STEPHANIE

Ah! . . .

PRINCESS

I must get her home to bed.

STEPHANIE

Shall I have a room prepared—here? She ought to lie down for an hour.

PRINCESS

Perhaps that would be better. (*To* GRAZIA.) Can you walk, darling?

GRAZIA

Yes. (*She shrinks back against her Mother.*) But not through the garden.

PRINCESS

You're going to lie down for a little while, darling.

RHODA

You're all right now, aren't you, Grazia?

GRAZIA (*trying to smile*)

Yes.

[*She glances again apprehensively toward the garden.*

DUKE

A good night's sleep and you'll forget that accident.

ALDA

We'll come and see you tomorrow, dear.

GRAZIA

Please do.

[*The* PRINCESS, GRAZIA *and* STEPHANIE *go out.*

DUKE (*sharply*)

Corrado, Eric, search the grounds!

ERIC

Very good.

CORRADO

We will, sir—

[*They exeunt, quickly, into the garden.*

[*The others speak lightly, but they are evidently shaken.*

ALDA

What a night! It just needed this excitement to top it off.

BARON

Good melodrama, my dear. It began with a laugh and ended in a shriek.

RHODA

I wish I could forget Grazia's scream. (*She glances apprehensively toward the garden.*) Alda, would you mind if I stayed in your room? I don't want to be alone.

ALDA

I wish you would. I confess I don't want to be alone, either.

BARON (*to* RHODA)

I thought English girls didn't have nerves. Outdoors all day.

ALDA

Scratch any woman and you'll find nerves, dear.
[*A shot rings from outside and all jump, the* BARON *particularly.*

BARON

Great Scott . . . what's that!

ALDA

Now who's nervy! (*She rises.*) Shall we go up, Rhoda? I'll feel safer in bed.

RHODA

So shall I. Would you mind if I locked the door and looked in the closet?

ALDA

Not a bit. If *you* don't I will.

RHODA

Could we talk for a little while?

ALDA

We're certain to. I can't sleep.
[*They exeunt upstairs.*

STEPHANIE (*entering*)

You are not coming, Lambert?

DUKE

No, dear. I'll wait for the boys.

STEPHANIE

Very well. Goodnight, dear.
[*She exits.*

DUKE

Goodnight, darling.

BARON

As for me I shall light a cigar and remember all the beautiful women who have done me the honor to love me. Remember, my boy, when you're old you don't sleep. Live a full life, and you'll have reminiscences for a mellow night cap. Goodnight.
[BARON *exits upstairs.*
[*Enter* CORRADO *and* ERIC *from the garden.*

DUKE

Oh there you are! Did you see anything?

CORRADO

Not a thing, sir.

ERIC

We looked everywhere, and there's not a sign of any one, sir.

DUKE

But the shot?

ERIC

I thought I saw something, but it was only a shadow.

CORRADO

Has Grazia gone, sir?

DUKE

No, she's lying down.

CORRADO

I'd like to get my hands on that prowler!

ERIC

So should I.

DUKE

Yes, if it was a prowler!

CORRADO

What do you mean, Father?

DUKE (*in a strange voice*)

I don't know. The most extraordinary things have happened tonight. You miss the precipice by an inch when you should have gone over; I run into a cart at fifty miles an hour; and nothing happens! No one is hurt!

ERIC

The mysteries do pile up, don't they, sir?

CORRADO

And Grazia . . . saw shadows . . .

DUKE

Exactly.

CORRADO (*anxiously*)

She was so terribly frightened, Father, may I go in?

DUKE

No, better not. I'll tell you when she's ready to go.

CORRADO

Right, sir. Come up to my room, Eric?

ERIC

Righto.

CORRADO

Will you join us, sir?

DUKE

No thanks. I'll sit about here for a while, and keep an eye on the garden.

CORRADO

All right. Come along Eric.

[CORRADO *and* ERIC *go upstairs. The* DUKE *stands looking out into the garden.*

[*Enter* FEDELE

FEDELE

Your Grace.

DUKE

Have you closed the house?

FEDELE

Yes, Your Grace.

DUKE

Then go to the garage and see what repairs the Fiat will need.

FEDELE

Shall I report tonight, sir?

DUKE

No, in the morning.

FEDELE

Will Your Grace have the curtains drawn?
[*He indicates the French windows.*

DUKE

No, leave them. I'll close them myself. And turn off the lights.
[FEDELE *presses a button. The room is almost in darkness, being lighted only by the table lamp. The chimes, off, strike midnight.*

FEDELE

Goodnight, Your Grace.

DUKE

Goodnight.
[FEDELE *exits. The* DUKE *crosses to divan and sits down. After a pause a presence is felt rather than seen standing above the steps in the garden. The* DUKE *turns.*

DUKE (*startled*)

Who, who's there? (*Rises.*) Who's there? (*Turns swiftly and takes gun from table drawer.*) Speak up, or I'll shoot!
[DUKE *lifts his gun and pulls the trigger. The gun does not even click. He tries to fire again with the same re-*

sult. A tall black shadow moves forward through the window. The DUKE *falls back in terror.*

[*The shadow is Death. His head is covered by a hood. From his shoulders a long black cloak falls. His face appears like the mask of death. His hands are gloved. He speaks in a rich voice which has a curious quality of ironic humor.*

SHADOW

I beg you not to be afraid.

DUKE (*gasping*)

Who . . . who . . . are you?

SHADOW (*in an amused tone*)

I don't wonder you ask. I suppose, as a caller, I *am* unusual, even unique.

DUKE (*lifting the gun*)

You stand back!

[*The* SHADOW *lifts his hand and lowers it slowly. With the motion the* DUKE *lowers his gun.*

SHADOW

It's quite useless against me. (*The* SHADOW *comes down.*) Break your gun. (*The* DUKE *does this, his eyes on the* SHADOW. *The bullets fall on the floor.*) Now pull the trigger. (THE DUKE *pulls the trigger. The gun clicks, audibly.*) You see, it works now. I should have let you shoot, but I was afraid it might waken your household and interfere with my plans. (*The* DUKE *gasps. This is nearly too much for him. The* SHADOW *regards him. His voice is amused.*) You seem badly shaken, but I suppose it's natural. You are the only

person who has ever faced me like this whose alarm was not justified.

DUKE (*hoarsely*)

Who . . . who are you?

SHADOW

Ah, I beg your pardon. I've been so interested in my reception that I have forgotten to explain. (*He hesitates.*) I'm afraid it will be difficult. Perhaps you had better sit. (*The* DUKE *starts to sit on the divan. The* SHADOW *indicates a chair.*) No, here . . . Your back may need support.

[*The* DUKE *crosses, backing away in terror.*

DUKE (*sitting*)

Is this some horrible masquerade? If it is . . .

SHADOW (*with a laugh*)

No, strange as it may seem this is my natural appearance. That is, to you. In justice to myself I ought to say that my true appearance is somewhat more attractive than this, but unfortunately I can appear to man only as he imagines me to be. (*The* DUKE *gasps. The* SHADOW *goes to him.*) That seems incredible, doesn't it? But then, the whole thing is incredible. . . . I'm afraid, my dear fellow, you will have to make a considerable effort. You see, I am not of your world. (*The* DUKE *shrinks from him as the* SHADOW *sits on the opposite side of the table.*) I am . . . how shall I describe it? A sort of . . . vagabond of space. Think, if you can, of infinity. That may help. Think of limitless reaches of light, and limitless reaches of

darkness. Think of sound that goes whispering on forever. You see, if you are to grasp this you will have to discard your usual formulas. . . . For instance, at one moment I am touching the evening star with my shadow and plucking some mortal on the earth by the sleeve. . . . Do I make myself clear? (*He looks at the* DUKE *who is staring, fascinated.*) Evidently not. I told you it would be difficult. (*He rises.*) You see, I am . . . or I was until I crossed your threshold . . . Death. (*The* DUKE *leaps to his feet.*) Ah, I thought it might give you a shock. But please be assured. I am not on my usual mission tonight. Quite the contrary. If I were, do you think we should be chatting like this? Instead I should have lain beside you for a moment on your bed, or breathed on your hair as you passed by. I have already stood beside one of you, tonight, without harm . . . that lovely girl in the garden.

[*He has moved beside the fireplace.*

DUKE

Ah . . . then it was you!

SHADOW

Yes. I didn't intend her to see me. She appears to be remarkably sensitive and aware. The rest of you, if I may say so, have been less acute. I have, you know, been with you all evening.

DUKE

Oh . . . then that explains . . .

SHADOW

Several things. Your son, I thought, was rather des-

perate tonight. If I had been playing my proper role I should have taken him and those charming young people in the car . . . regretfully, I assure you. I positively had to hold his wheels on the edge of that precipice.

DUKE

You . . . held . . .

SHADOW

Yes . . . quite. And I brought your flying cart driver to earth. I was absent minded for a moment or I shouldn't have allowed that accident. But really, you and your son ought not to drive like that, when I am . . . myself.

DUKE (*recovering*)

You saved . . .

SHADOW (*with a laugh*)

Amusing, isn't it? Death in the role of guardian angel. But I did. Doesn't that reassure you that I have no . . . er . . . lethal intentions?

DUKE

It does, rather.

[*The* DUKE *has recovered his poise and his breath. He is getting used to this strange visitor.*

SHADOW

That's better. In a moment we shall be, I trust, quite good friends. But perhaps you had better sit again. There are a few more unusual details. (*The* DUKE *sits on the divan. The* SHADOW *follows and sits beside him,*

the DUKE *drawing back.*) I am about to take a holiday. Again that sounds incredible, doesn't it? Even to me. Think of it . . . for the first time in history there will be no murders, no fatal accidents. No man will even die in his bed. Not a leaf will fall, or a star from heaven. Nothing will decay, nothing crumble. There will be only life, and growth . . . A sort of cosmic springtime. . . . (*He sits contemplating this as though in awe, then laughs.*) But don't be alarmed. It can't go on long, or there would be a serious overcrowding. Of course, that could be remedied by another world war, but that gives me so much work. I shall take three days only, and crowd as much as possible into them. After that I must go back.

DUKE (*in a more normal tone*)

But why are you doing this?

SHADOW

For a number of reasons . . . For one thing, to discover why men fear me as they do.

DUKE

Don't you know?

[*The* SHADOW'S *tone changes suddenly. An inner intensity makes itself felt.*

SHADOW

How should I know, who have never experienced a mortal sensation? What could terror mean to me, who have nothing to fear? Or pity, when I must not pity? Or kindness, or aspiration, or love? These are only words to me, whose meaning I am curious to discover.

(*He pauses a moment. His tone is light.*) In particular I should like to know something of love. It appears to be a potent force which makes men do quite mad things. . . . It is the word most often on the lips of man when he goes with me, unless he is old and spent with life. (*He pauses again. There is a sudden return of his intensity.*) And there is another reason. . . . Can you conceive how weary I am of always being misunderstood? . . . I see things that are gracious, and young, and fragrant; and sometimes I desire them, with a vague and aching tenderness. . . . But if I come too near . . . if they feel the presence of my shadow, a horror comes upon their minds. (*He rises with an intense, restless movement.*) Can you conceive how lonely I am, when there is nothing that doesn't shun me, that doesn't shrink as I come near?

DUKE (*slowly*)

Yes, of course . . .

SHADOW (*intensely, as though to himself*)

There is something here . . . to be known and felt . . . something desirable that makes men fear me and cling to their life. I must know what it is! (*He pauses abruptly.*) In short, my dear sir, I wish to live a complete life in the space of three days.

DUKE (*gasping*)

But, how can you?

SHADOW (*amused*)

I don't quite know, but I'm sure the attempt will be interesting. And you can help me, if you will.

DUKE

I?

SHADOW

You and your friends. Obviously I must have a place for my experiment. I was passing, by chance, and saw the Villa Happiness written above your lintel. It had a charming sound. So I find myself here, asking your hospitality. . . . Will you accept me, for these few days, as a guest?

DUKE (*gasping*)

As . . . as a guest?

SHADOW (*amused*)

Don't be alarmed. As a mortal, of course. I assure you I shall be quite a man of the world.

DUKE (*with an effort*)

Why, in that case . . . I should be, . . . most happy.

SHADOW (*going to him*)

That's extremely kind of you. I realize, of course, that I am asking a great deal. . . . And now, my dear Duke Lambert de Catolica. . . .

DUKE (*astonished*)

Do you know my name?

SHADOW

Quite. And your age; forty-three years and three months. Is that correct?

DUKE

Yes.

SHADOW (*a little pointedly*)

I believe that is known as the prime of life. You seem, if I may say so, particularly contented and well, as though you enjoyed life? You do . . . enjoy life?

DUKE (*uncertainly*)

Yes, I do . . . thoroughly.

SHADOW

Good. You're exactly the man I want. . . .

DUKE

Oh!

SHADOW

To study. Will it be a great trouble to put me up? Will it?

[*The last words are a sudden threat. The* DUKE *speaks quickly.*

DUKE

No, not in the least. I have a suite of rooms prepared for an old friend who was expected, Prince Sirki, of Vitalba Alexandri. . . .

SHADOW (*starting*)

Oh . . . Prince Sirki . . .

DUKE (*also starting*)

Oh . . . then . . . you?

SHADOW

Yes . . . just this evening. I didn't know, of course, that he was a friend of yours.

DUKE

Then . . . I'm not to expect . . .

SHADOW

No, I'm sorry. . . .

DUKE

Ah . . . poor Sirki . . .
[*They both shake their heads, sadly.*

SHADOW

That gives me a suggestion. Was the Prince known to your family and your guests?

DUKE

No, none of them knew him.

SHADOW (*after a pause*)

Good. Then, since I have unfortunately been obliged to deprive you of a guest, it seems only just that I should take his place. I shall, therefore, be Prince Sirki of Vitalba Alexandri, for three days.

DUKE (*bowing*)

As you will.

SHADOW (*genially*)

And please understand that my presence in your house will not be a menace, but a protection.

DUKE (*breathlessly*)

Oh, thank you.

SHADOW

On one condition, on which I shall insist.

DUKE

Yes?

SHADOW (*with cold authority*)

I am to be Prince Sirki . . . no other. I shall be a mortal, and I must be treated as a mortal, in every particular. I require that no one under this roof, and no one who may visit you shall show repulsion or fear, on pain of my instant displeasure.

DUKE

I understand, Your Highness.

SHADOW

You are the head of this house and therefore responsible. Your guests could not bear the knowledge of my name. If my secret is divulged, I shall leave instantly as Sirki and return in my proper person. Do I make myself clear?

DUKE (*bowing*)

Perfectly!

SHADOW

I will have nothing distasteful on my holiday. If any one violates my command, I shall leave, instantly, as a mortal and return as . . .

[*He nods his head significantly.*

DUKE (*with difficulty*)

I understand, Your Highness.

SHADOW (*in a changed tone*)

Forgive me if I am severe. I am a little sensitive on that point. (*Cordially.*) Then, it is a bargain?

[*He holds out one claw-like hand which the* DUKE *reluctantly takes.*

DUKE

It is.

[*The* SHADOW *turns away and draws a deep breath. He has become curiously absorbed. The inner tension is again increasingly apparent, rising, after a moment, to something near hysteria.*

SHADOW

And so I am at last to become a mortal! . . . I shall feel blood in my veins . . . warm blood of life. I shall feel my desire becoming flesh and my hunger taking the fire of blood. . . . I shall know what you know, and feel what you feel. . . . When I take flowers in my hands they will not wither. . . . And youth will not run from me with terrified eyes. . . . (*He makes a movement of intense restlessness, as though his inner pressure were near agony.*) My hunger shall be appeased for an hour . . . my hunger that is as old as time. . . . And those that I love need not . . . be afraid, not afraid, not afraid! (*He laughs with insane intensity.*) No . . . no . . . I am beside myself . . . My holiday is just caprice . . . a mad joke I play with life. . . . Ha, Ha . . . what a monstrous, what a sublime joke. . . . (*He draws himself up with a mocking laugh.*) I, Death, do hereby take on the world, the flesh and the Devil! (*With an effort the* SHADOW *masters himself.*) Forgive me, my friend. My sense of humor overcame me for a moment. . . . And now shall we begin our interesting experiment?

DUKE (*hesitantly*)

Yes . . . but . . .

SHADOW

There is some doubt in your mind. What is it?

DUKE (*uncertainly*)

Forgive me . . . but . . . your face . . .

[*The* SHADOW *covers his face, suddenly, with one hand.*

SHADOW

Is it so terrible?

DUKE (*hastily*)

Not to me . . . now . . . But you must remember that all men are born with a fear of that face.

SHADOW

Of course, I had forgotten for a moment. It is one of the stupid terrors that are nurtured in children, which only the most mature minds shake off. It's not very intelligent of you, you know, to make me only a symbol of decay. I am sleep, too . . . and the fulfillment of dreams . . . I am the gateway to life that is beyond life.

DUKE

But . . . couldn't you . . .

SHADOW

Of course. I shall borrow the Lamp of Illusion.

DUKE

Of what?

SHADOW

Of Illusion. Surely you know . . .

DUKE

I don't quite follow.

SHADOW

Well, I've found that very few mortals can bear to face life as it really is. It seems to them stark, and forbidding, like the outlines of my face, until Illusion softens it with her rosy lamp.

DUKE

Oh yes, I see.

SHADOW

It's rather a pity, because, you know, the real is so much more, shall we say, beautiful, than the illusion. However, time is still young and one mustn't expect too much. So I shall borrow the lamp for my holiday.

DUKE

Then this will change . . .

SHADOW (*amused*)

My entire person . . . (*He laughs.*) I am just beginning to see the possibilities of this. It will be most entertaining. I think your guests may find me not unattractive, thanks to my lamp. And you will not find me a poor masquerader! Expect me soon. (*He starts away, then turns at the top of the steps.*) You are to be distinguished among hosts, sir. None has entertained Death before, and lived.

[*With a long bound he disappears. Several shots are fired from above. The* DUKE *makes a movement of terror.*

CORRADO (*off*)

Stop him . . . ! Stop him . . . !

[*More shots.* CORRADO *and* ERIC *run down the stairs and rush for steps to the garden.*

DUKE (*terrified*)

Corrado . . . for God's sake!

[*Enter* FEDELE *running.*

FEDELE

Your Grace . . . what is it?

DUKE

Corrado . . . stop . . . on your life!

CORRADO (*pausing*)

He disappeared over the hedge!

DUKE

Come down, instantly!

FEDELE

Shall I call the servants, Your Grace?

DUKE (*with an effort to speak calmly*)

No . . . Turn on the lights. Go to the left wing, immediately. Prepare the rooms. They must be ready in five minutes . . . Work as you never worked before!

FEDELE

Yes, Your Grace.

[*He goes to the door, hesitates and stands curiously.*

CORRADO

Father . . . are you all right?

[*The* DUKE *presses his hands to his head trying to collect his whirling thoughts.*

DUKE (*in an odd voice*)

I don't see why your pistol fired. Mine didn't.

CORRADO

Father . . . what do you mean?

DUKE (*checking himself*)

Nothing . . .

ERIC

Did you see the fellow, and shoot?

[*Enter* ALDA, *and* RHODA, *down the stairs,* STEPHANIE *from right.*

STEPHANIE

Lambert . . . are you hurt?

DUKE

No. . . .

ALDA

Oh, what is it?

RHODA

Is any one shot?

DUKE

Wait, everybody . . .

(*He sees* FEDELE *at the door. He would like to shout, but speaks with tremendous repression.*)

I told you to go . . . Prepare those rooms, instantly!

[*Exit* FEDELE *reluctantly.*

STEPHANIE

Rooms? For whom?

CORRADO

Father . . . can't you tell us what's the matter?

[*Enter* BARON.

BARON

What in the world is all this fuss about? Am I never to get any sleep?

ERIC

Corrado saw a fellow running in the garden, and shot.

BARON

Ah, the villain, who . . .

CORRADO

By God . . . he may be still in the grounds.

[*He starts rear.*

DUKE (*sharply*)

Corrado . . . stop!

CORRADO

But why? He may be the fellow who frightened Grazia.

DUKE

He was . . .

CORRADO

Then let's get him . . .
[*He starts away again.*

DUKE (*almost screaming*)

Come back! You mustn't go out there.

CORRADO

Why not?

STEPHANIE

Is there any danger?

DUKE (*to* CORRADO)

You shouldn't have fired. Oh, God . . . if you had angered him!

CORRADO

Who *is* this man?
[RHODA *in sudden fear goes to* ALDA *who puts an arm about her.*

ALDA

Don't be afraid, dear.

BARON

Is everybody mad?

STEPHANIE

Lambert, can't you tell us?

DUKE (*faintly*)

Give me some brandy, somebody.
[ERIC *gives him a glass of brandy.*

ERIC

Here, sir. You seem rather shaken.

DUKE

Forgive me . . . I've just had . . . an extraordinary experience.

CORRADO

Do you mean you saw the man and talked with him?

DUKE (*after swallowing the brandy*)

Yes . . . (*He presses his forehead.*) It seems unreal . . . but I must have talked . . . You saw him, too, didn't you, Corrado?

CORRADO

Yes. I was looking out of the window . . . and suddenly I saw some one running through the garden, in the strangest dress. I fired, and he seemed to float over the hedge.

BARON

Float over the hedge. What nonsense!

ERIC

I'm not sure. There's something damned queer . . .

DUKE (*with a strange laugh*)

More than that . . . Unbelievable . . . Monstrous . . . No . . . (*He checks himself.*) If I seem to talk wildly, you mustn't be troubled. There's no danger. He promised . . .

ALDA

Who promised, Lambert? Can't you tell us?

DUKE (*slowly, after a pause*)

No, I can't. (*He rises, and forces a light tone.*) But Grazia's safe. That's all that matters. And now, I have something of the greatest importance to tell you all. We are to have a guest tonight. Prince Sirki of Vitalba Alexandri.

STEPHANIE

Then the Prince is here?

DUKE

No . . . that is, he's coming, almost at once. And if he seems eccentric . . . or strange . . . you must take no notice. Treat him as a Prince and a gentleman, always. This is more important than I can tell you. And, above all, you mustn't be afraid.

ALDA

But why should we be afraid?

DUKE (*off guard*)

He might be offended, don't you see? And if he were . . . (*He pulls himself together.*) You must be gay, and laugh with him. And no matter what happens, you must never shun him, or protest . . . or run . . . It would be no good if you did . . . You can't run from . . .

[*He checks himself sharply. There is a general movement of fear in the group.*

RHODA

Alda, I'm afraid.

FEDELE (*entering*)

His Highness, Prince Sirki!

[*The* SHADOW *enters in the fatigue uniform of a grand duke of Russia. As he enters the Lamp of Illusion begins to glow on the wall. He wears a great coat and cap, and a monocle in his eye. He hands his cap to* FEDELE *and comes down the steps. He clicks his heels and bows. The women curtsey and the men bow. All the guests are astonished and delighted at his distinguished appearance.*

DUKE (*gasping*)

Sirki! (*There is a pause. He makes an effort and speaks.*) Welcome, Your Serene Highness, to the Villa Happiness.

[*The* SHADOW's *voice becomes the pleasantly modulated voice of a man of the world, with a slight accent.*

SHADOW

Thank you, my dear Duke. I am so happy to be here.

DUKE

We are more than honored. (*He forces a clear brave tone which evidently requires an effort.*) May I present my wife, Prince Sirki.

[STEPHANIE *crosses, offers her hand, and curtseys.*

STEPHANIE (*warmly*)

Your Highness is most welcome.

SHADOW

Thank you. (*He smiles.*) I have rarely been so charmingly received.

DUKE

And now, may I present my guests?

SHADOW

It will be a pleasure.

DUKE

Madam Alda.

[*The* SHADOW *advances to her.* ALDA *curtseys. He kisses her hand, evidently likes the sensation and does it again.*

SHADOW

May I say, I had not realized that the women of your country were so beautiful.

ALDA

Your Highness is most kind.

SHADOW (*in a deep voice*)

I wish that we might never meet when you are less beautiful and I must be less kind.

DUKE

Miss Rhoda Fenton, Your Highness.

[*The* SHADOW *regards her for a moment then crosses to her.* RHODA *extends her hand.*

SHADOW (*in an altered tone, looking at her hand*)

Oh, young . . . and firm . . . and full of life! And it lies so trustingly in mine. It's strange how beautiful a simple act can be. (*He releases her hand and smiles.*) Thank you, Miss Fenton. You have done me a kindness, tonight.

DUKE

The Baron Cesarea, sir. A statesman who was once important in the affairs of the world, who now looks back on a long and interesting life.

[*The* BARON *comes forward quickly, with importance.*

SHADOW (*going to him*)

I am delighted to meet the Baron . . . at last . . .

BARON

And I to meet you, Your Highness.

(*The* SHADOW *releases his hand and turns his back on him, watching* ALDA *and* RHODA.)

Indebted to you, greatly, sir, for an exciting evening. You make a mysterious and dramatic appearance. My rheumatism disappears at the same time, and I feel years younger. If I go on like this I shall take up statesmanship again.

SHADOW (*turning back and smiling*)

Don't, I beg you. I remember that it was you who brought Italy into the Great War.

BARON

As a Prince and statesman, I hope you approve.

SHADOW (*smiling*)

I was not thinking as a . . . Prince and statesman. But as . . . (*He checks himself and bows, ending the interview.*) We shall talk further, my dear Baron, of several things. Considering your distinction and age, it is surprising that fate has not introduced us before.

BARON

Delighted, sir.

[*The* DUKE *indicates* ERIC *and* CORRADO.

DUKE

Mr. Eric Fenton . . . (*Both bow.*) And my son, Corrado.

SHADOW (*offering his hand*)

Ah, the son who drives so furiously. (*There is a pause, the* SHADOW *regards the group.*) My friends . . . permit me to call you my friends . . .

ALL

Your Highness.

SHADOW

Please make no change in your plans because of my sudden appearance. I should like to join in your pleasures, if I may, and enjoy the hours with you. I beg you not to make a stranger of me.

DUKE

Will Your Highness have a little refreshment?

SHADOW

Refreshment?

[*The word is evidently strange. He accustoms his mind to it.*

DUKE

A glass of wine?

SHADOW (*doubtfully*)

Oh yes, a glass of wine.

DUKE

Corrado. . . .

[CORRADO *brings a glass of wine. The* SHADOW *considers it, smilingly.*

SHADOW

I have never tasted wine . . . of your country . . . May I drink to this delightful household? I believe that is one of your customs, is it not?

DUKE

It is, yes. And may I thank you for myself and my guests?

SHADOW (*lifting his glass*)

To this household . . . to life . . . and to all brave illusion.

(*He sips and starts to hand the glass to* CORRADO *when he reconsiders and drinks more.* CORRADO *starts to take the glass.*)

Wait a minute.

(*He finishes the wine. The* SHADOW *stands as though weighing the effect. His face lights with a curious smile.*)

I think I shall enjoy your wine. It goes pleasantly in my veins.

DUKE (*smiling*)

It is often a consolation.

SHADOW

Ah, I see. One of the handmaids of illusion.

[*Enter* FEDELE.

FEDELE.

The rooms are ready, Your Grace.
[*Exit* FEDELE.

SHADOW

My rooms?

DUKE

Yes. At your pleasure.

SHADOW

Then, if you will forgive me, I think I will go now. (*He smiles again secretly.*) I have not slept, for ages, and I feel curiously tired. (*He bows to the group.*) Goodnight, my friends. My holiday begins most agreeably.
[*All bow and murmur* "Good night Your Highness." *As the* SHADOW *turns to cross, the* PRINCESS *and* GRAZIA *enter, left. The* SHADOW *pauses suddenly, his eyes on* GRAZIA.

DUKE

Your Highness, may I present the Princess of San Luca, and her daughter, Grazia . . . Prince Sirki.
[*The* PRINCESS *bows, murmuring* "Your Highness." *The* SHADOW *and* GRAZIA *stand as though they had heard nothing. Then the* SHADOW *bows and stands aside as the* PRINCESS *and* GRAZIA *pass,* GRAZIA *and the* SHADOW *holding each others' eyes. The* SHADOW *starts to exit, he takes a few steps, looks back at* GRAZIA, *then exits as the curtain falls.*

CURTAIN

ACT TWO

ACT TWO

Scene: The same.

Outside, the flowers and vines appear more profuse and brilliant. They seem crowding into the room.

Music and occasional sounds of laughter off stage as though an entertainment were in progress.

There is a sense of expectancy and strain in the air. All the guests when they appear, except the BARON, *are taut and apprehensive.*

Time: Nine o'clock in the evening three days later.

At rise: CORRADO *is seated, in full evening dress, looking unhappy. Enter the* BARON, *also in full evening dress, looking very doggy.*

BARON

What, moping, my boy, on a night like this? Ah, I know . . . Grazia hasn't come. Why are she and the Princess so late?

CORRADO

I don't know, sir. (*He tries for a cheerful tone.*) You're looking very gay tonight.

BARON

I'm feeling a very blade of a fellow. Positively a blade, Do you know, I haven't worn a gardenia or made love to a beautiful woman in ten years. But tonight my blood's up.

CORRADO

The Prince seems to be enjoying himself, too.

BARON

I should think so! I never saw a man so surrounded. It makes me positively envious.

CORRADO

He's altogether too fascinating.

BARON

Did you ever see a man do things with such zest? One might think he never had a good time before, and every hour was his last. . . . Ah, but I had zest, too, when I was young. Just like his. . . . I wish Marie were here. Tonight I could . . . (*Enter* CORA *with wraps over her arm. The* BARON *goes to her. He fingers a white cloak, his face ecstatic.*) Ah, ermine! Just slipped from a white shoulder, and warm from it still! Delicious! Perhaps it is Marie's. (*He lifts the sleeve and smells it.*) Notte d'amore. No, that's the Duchess de San Juliano. Marie's scent is La Rose Blanche.

[*Enter the* SHADOW *slowly in time to hear the last lines.*

SHADOW

Notte d'amore? La rose blanche?

BARON

Perfumes, Your Highness, worn by beautiful women such as have been crowding about you. Surely you're not leaving them!

[CORRADO *stands looking out into the garden, for a moment, then exits slowly. He is in the full dress uniform of a Grand Duke.*

SHADOW (*drily*)

For a moment, Baron. I find that I need air.

BARON

Ah.

SHADOW

I am not used to this mixture of perfume and warm flesh. It is . . . disturbing.

BARON

But such a pleasant disturbance! Ah, I wish I knew the secret of your popularity!

SHADOW (*ironically*)

It is quite simple. Suggest that you have great depths of wisdom and great depths of passion which no one has really discovered. They will come flocking.

BARON (*delighted*)

That's it. That's it, exactly. Great depths of passion! I'll do it.

SHADOW

Of course, in my case it happens to be true.

BARON

Ah, and I almost believe it's true of me, tonight.

SHADOW (*in a changed tone*)

Tell me Baron . . . you have lived a long while . . . what are the things that men like yourself value most?

BARON

Why . . .

SHADOW

What is this thing of great price that dignifies our life, and makes it dear?

BARON

It is very flattering of you to ask. . . .

SHADOW

I have been joining in your games and in your dances. I have won some bits of metal at a little wheel. (*He tosses a purse of gold on the table.*) It seems to me that we are like children, playing with toys, passing the time while we wait for something . . . for that thing of great price. Beneath this play I hear the voice of a deep hunger, unsatisfied. For what? Can you tell me?

BARON

Philosophers have never agreed about the ultimate good.

SHADOW (*a little impatiently*)

I am asking you as a person.

BARON

Why, in my own case, I have had two aims . . . love and power.

SHADOW

Power! I have power, but that is a lonely thing. I thought this good was something to be shared.

BARON

Of course, men have chosen other things. . . . Religion, for instance. They have even died for that.

SHADOW

Yes, I have known many of them. They died in defense of their own opinion. But at least they were not afraid.

BARON

I used to say, in my young days, that I would die for love. I often threatened it.

SHADOW (*impatiently*)

It seems to me that men have not begun to discover the magnificence of their life. . . . To breathe the perfumed air of a garden! To feel one's strong body moving in the sun! To feel thought flashing on the mind, and emotion like a glowing fire in the soul! . . . There is splendor here, if one can find it. (*He gestures toward the garden.*) Out there is the night, crowded with beauty! And we herd inside, feverish over little games. Why?

BARON (*slyly*)

Haven't you found that only lovers care to be alone in the night?

SHADOW

Perhaps that's it. Perhaps that beauty is too great to be borne, unless it is shared. . . . Tell me, Baron . . . you see I am a little strange to your ways . . . how does one find that love, or know when one has found it?

BARON (*slyly*)

The language of eyes and lips is universal, is it not, Your Highness?

SHADOW (*sternly*)

I am serious.

BARON

Why, one meets a beautiful creature . . . preferably a beautiful creature . . . and something electric passes between you. Then there is the prelude of talk, long or short. (*He laughs.*) I remember once coming down stairs, in a room much like this, and finding a lovely girl sitting alone. I stopped, and our eyes met. After a long look I stepped to the wall, dimmed the lights, and a moment later she was in my arms. A divine creature!

SHADOW (*drily*)

Again that sounds like playing with toys.

BARON (*gently*)

I am speaking of affairs, of course. There was one whom I loved, with whom I could share . . . anything. But she died.

SHADOW

Yes, I remember. The Countess Sfortza.

BARON (*quickly*)

You knew her?

SHADOW

I met her, just once, toward the end of her life.

BARON

She resembled the Princess, Grazia's mother. By the way, Your Highness, what do you make of the extraor-

dinary things that are happening. You've seen the newspapers, of course?

SHADOW

No, that is a habit I have never acquired.

BARON

Really?

SHADOW

They deal chiefly with accidents and murders, do they not?

BARON

I'm afraid the less reputable . . .

SHADOW

I'm a little tired of that sort of thing. It isn't news to me.

BARON

Then you didn't see the account of the man who jumped from the Eiffel Tower, and picked himself up unhurt?

SHADOW (*quickly*)

Oh, poor fellow! He was probably desperately unhappy. I must do something about that.

BARON

You!

SHADOW (*smiling*)

Well, I might write him a note of condolence.

BARON (*delighted*)

Capital, capital! What a sense of humor you have!

SHADOW

I am so glad that somebody has found that out.

BARON.

Then there's that situation on the Algerian front. Not a shot fired for three days. I don't understand it.

SHADOW

Don't worry, my friend. Your sacred privilege of blowing each other to bits is quite safe. They will begin again tomorrow.

BARON (*puzzled*)

Yes, I suppose . . .

[*Enter* CORRADO *slowly from the garden.*

SHADOW

Ah, Corrado, I think I will have one of your drinks.

CORRADO

Cognac, sir?

SHADOW

Yes, thank you. And one for the Baron, eh?

BARON

By all means! I've had to be careful for some years, but tonight I feel like a four-bottle man. Do you know that term, sir?

SHADOW

Very well. I've known many four-bottle men. They were so cheerful that they were not even afraid of me.

BARON

Afraid of you, sir?

SHADOW (*drily*)

I have been known to inspire fear.
[CORRADO *brings them each a glass.*

BARON

This is like old times for me. You know, in my young days we would sit up all night, drinking and talking of love and religion. Night after night!

SHADOW (*wistfully*)

Night after night! How prodigal that sounds. And I have but three hours!

BARON

You, sir?

SHADOW

I mean among these friends. . . . But, Baron, why do you say religion *and* love? They are two words with the same meaning, I should think.

BARON

Of course they are! Of course they are! What a magnificent mind you have. And what a lover you must be!

SHADOW

Ah . . . if I had time! (*He lifts his glass.*) My dear Baron, let us drink to three things: To beauty, to love, and to ecstasy that is their child.

BARON (*delighted*)

Splendid. What a magnificent toast. To beauty, to love and to ecstasy.

[*They drink. The* SHADOW *turns abruptly to* CORRADO, *handing him his glass. His tone is curt.*

SHADOW

The Princess and Grazia have not come. Do you know why?

CORRADO

No, sir. I've been expecting them every moment.

SHADOW

They must not be too late. (*He turns to the* BARON. CORRADO *takes both glasses and goes to the buffet.*) I shall go and think a little about these things. (*He picks up the purse of gold.*) Will you give these bits of metal to your favorite charity? I have no further use for them.

BARON

With pleasure, Your Highness. (*The* SHADOW *turns abruptly and goes up the stairs. Looking after him.*) What a magnificent man! What a princely manner! (*He stands listening to the music.*) Ah, my boy, it's the flavor of the old days for me. You don't know how the dead leaves are stirring in me . . . how life is stirring beneath them.

[*He exits as* ERIC *enters.* CORRADO *is mixing himself a drink.*

ERIC

No value in that, Corrado. It won't help your nerves.

CORRADO

I suppose you're right, but one always thinks it will. My nerves need something.

ERIC

So do mine. I'm jumpy as the devil. (*He goes to the table.*) You might give me a spot, after all.

CORRADO (*pouring him a drink*)

Right. Well, cheerio!

ERIC

Cheer-o—

[*They drink.*

ERIC

I thought the war had given me all the varieties of chill there are. But there's something about this . . . Prince.

CORRADO

I wish he wouldn't look at me so, Eric, as though he were always watching and listening. That secret smile of his makes me shiver.

ERIC

I wager it's a damned queer country he comes from. Siberia, probably. I fancy he'd enjoy condemning a few Russian exiles to death . . . most politely, of course.

CORRADO (*sitting on divan*)

He's friendly enough . . . but . . . you know, I've seen princes before, and kings, too. Nothing remark-

able about them. But this is the most uncanny . . .

ERIC

And your father's so watchful. Always on guard.

CORRADO

Holding his breath as though something might happen.

ERIC (*half to himself*)

As if there were some danger.

CORRADO

Father isn't afraid for himself. He's a brave man.

ERIC

I wish he'd tell us.

CORRADO

I wish he would. I'm terribly anxious about him.

ERIC

He said, "You can't run from . . ." If only he had finished that sentence!

[*The* DUKE *descends the stairs looking strained and grave.*

CORRADO

Father!

DUKE

Yes?

CORRADO

Father . . . won't you take us into your confidence?

DUKE

About what, Corrado?

CORRADO

This Prince. Won't you tell us what's worrying you?

DUKE

There's nothing to worry about, old boy.

CORRADO

But there is. We're not blind, you know.

ERIC

We'd like to stand by you, sir, if there is any reason.

DUKE

That's very good of you, Fenton. But there is nothing to be done. Oh, Corrado— (*Hesitatingly.*) Please be extremely careful this evening.

CORRADO

How?

DUKE

Don't let any one see that you're worried. Be . . . be particularly friendly with the Prince. It's his last evening, and I want it to be pleasant. (*Enter* PRINCESS *from garden. She comes to them quickly.*) Ah, Marie, you're late. Is Grazia with you?

[ERIC *exits.*

PRINCESS

No. She may come later . . . if . . .

DUKE (*quickly*)

Oh . . . she mustn't miss this evening, on any account!

PRINCESS (*looking at him closely*)

Why?

DUKE

It would be . . .

PRINCESS

Lambert . . . (*Pause.*) What is all this mystery about?

DUKE

Mystery?

PRINCESS

Yes. You all seemed concerned about something. Who is this man?

DUKE (*slowly*)

Prince Sirki. . . .

PRINCESS

I feel that you are concealing something.

DUKE

Please, Marie.

PRINCESS

And Grazia has been very strange these past three days. . . . Restless . . . and almost exalted. I think she is attracted to this man. And if there is any reason why she should not be . . .

CORRADO (*desperately*)

They're all fascinated!

DUKE

No . . . No, they couldn't be . . .

PRINCESS

Why?

DUKE

I mean . . . nothing could come of it. He wouldn't encourage them. And Marie, it's his last evening. He goes at midnight.

CORRADO

Why at midnight?

DUKE (*off guard*)

That's his natural . . . That is . . . it's a whim of his, just a whim, nothing more.

PRINCESS

I wish you might be frank with me. As it is I think I must forbid Grazia to come.

DUKE (*sharply*)

Don't do that!

CORRADO

Do keep her at home, Princess.

DUKE (*desperately*)

You mustn't! It might be . . . (*He pauses, then speaks earnestly.*) Marie . . . I love Grazia, almost as much as you do. If any harm threatens her I shall

know. What I am doing is for the best . . . for all of us. Please believe that I would give my life for Grazia.

CORRADO

We all would.

PRINCESS

Then there is no reason why she should not come?

DUKE

None.

PRINCESS (*after a pause*)

Very well. I must take your word, of course.

CORRADO

I'll take care of her, Princess.

PRINCESS (*gives* CORRADO *wrap*)

Thank you, dear; and will you telephone for her to come?

[BARON *enters looking very young and doggy.*

CORRADO

Yes, of course.

[*Exit* CORRADO.

BARON

Beautiful creature! I've been looking for you!

PRINCESS

My dear Baron, how you startled me. I thought I was seeing the beau of twenty years earlier.

BARON (*pleased*)

And so you are. So you are, my dear.

DUKE

He's been the youngest member of the party, for three days. He appears to enjoy the Prince's visit.

BARON

A delightful fellow. A statesman of immense vision.

DUKE

The Princess has a feeling that he might be a dangerous man.

BARON

Dangerous, fiddlesticks! Safest and soundest man I've ever met, except that he's a bit too much of an internationalist for my taste.

DUKE

Yes!—well, I hope you will persuade her, Baron.
[*He exits.*

BARON (*beaming*)

Ah, beautiful creature!

PRINCESS

But, Baron, what has happened to you?

BARON

Ha . . . a discovery I've made. . . . Three nights ago I suddenly thought, why get old? Why give in to it? That's what I thought. And from that moment I felt younger. I've dropped twenty years in no time.

PRINCESS

How delightful! Do you think it would work with me, if I tried?

BARON

Of course it would, only you don't need it. Never saw you looking so beautiful. When I was old I didn't notice it. Too tired, I suppose. But you, my dear, don't need any prescriptions. You're the finished product.

PRINCESS (*smiling*)

Finished?

BARON (*kissing her hand gallantly*)

Complete. The perfect rose.

PRINCESS

How charming. I really believe I'm blushing.

BARON (*delighted*)

Ha . . . That proves it. I can still bring a blush to a woman's cheek. Marvelous . . . And I didn't use any restoratives or Voronoff's pills, either. Just put my mind on it. (*He becomes the beau again.*) Do you know, Marie, you're a very beautiful woman. It's growing on me. I wish I could see you every day, for the rest of my life.

PRINCESS (*amused*)

My dear Baron, are you, by any chance, proposing to me?

BARON (*immensely pleased*)

By Jove. . . . I believe I am. But it mustn't be done before an audience. I must find an intimate corner. The Conservatory.

PRINCESS (*rising*)

That's where you proposed before, you know.

BARON

So I did . . . so I did. (*They begin to walk off.*) Ha . . . gorgeous woman . . . music in the distance! Now I'm living again.

PRINCESS

You're quite safe, you know. I shan't accept you.

[ALDA *enters and stands looking up toward stairs.*

BARON

Ha . . . We'll see about that. I'm irresistible tonight. Simply irresistible. (ERIC *enters. As the* BARON *passes* ALDA *he kisses her hand.*) Marvelous woman. (*This to* ALDA.) Ravishing creature!

[*This to* PRINCESS. *He gives her his arm and they go out.*

ERIC (*entering*)

The old boy's in astonishing form. I can't understand it. I'm a mass of nerves.

ALDA

So am I.

ERIC (*after a pause*)

Have you been able to sleep at all?

ALDA

No. Have you?

ERIC

I've dozed a little, and then started up as though a

shell had fallen on the dug-out. Curious, but I've been living the war all over again.

ALDA

I daren't let go of consciousness at all. . . . Eric, who is this man? What is he . . . that he should draw . . . and frighten us so?

ERIC (*with a groan*)

God . . . I wish I knew.

ALDA (*tense and almost mystical*)

When I'm talking with him . . . I have a sense of something . . . limitless . . . as though there were a shadow behind him which reaches . . . into eternity. . . . And when he's not in the room, I feel the shadow still present . . . drawn close about me. . . .

ERIC (*tersely*)

Yes . . . stifling . . .

ALDA (*with a shaky laugh*)

I feel him always at my shoulder. . . . Tonight I couldn't bear to look in the mirror. I was afraid I might see him behind me . . . with that extraordinary face.

ERIC

Damn him!

ALDA

And when he speaks to me . . . I see . . .

ERIC (*desperately*)

Alda . . . are you in love with this man?

ALDA (*simply*)

No, not in love . . . fascinated . . . completely . . .

ERIC

For God's sake, can't you pull up? Don't think I'm being a cad. I'm not thinking of myself.

ALDA

It's hopeless, Eric.

ERIC (*intensely*)

Alda, don't let yourself go! I tell you, there's something inhuman, and cruel about that fellow. He might . . .

ALDA

I know. And yet I'm caught, like a bird by some great snake's eyes. It's no use to struggle. I'm being drawn nearer . . . and nearer . . .

ERIC (*with resignation*)

And I have to stand, and watch that struggle!

[ALDA *rises, restlessly. She stands looking at the Lamp of Illusion.*

ALDA

I wonder what that lamp has to do with the mystery. He said that it holds his secret. He laughed so strangely when he said it.

ERIC

That's only an old lamp that he gave the Duke. An heirloom of some sort. But why is it lighted during the day? I've just remembered that it is.

ALDA

I asked him that. And he smiled again, and said, "A bit of decoration to give couleur de rose to my adventure."

ERIC

It's all damned queer.

[*Enter* RHODA *cautiously. She looks like a tired, bewildered child. Her attempt to speak casually is only pitiful.*

RHODA

Eric, I wish you wouldn't leave me alone.

ERIC

Why?

RHODA

I keep thinking I'll meet *him* on the stairs, or in the hall. I don't want to meet him, and yet I hope he will be there. I don't want him to speak to me, and yet when he does I wish his voice would never stop.

ERIC

You, too!

RHODA

Yes.

ERIC

My God!

[*He makes a gesture of hopelessness and exits.*

RHODA

It's like a symphony by some mad Russian . . . full of . . . indescribable things . . .

ALDA (*going to her*)

You're looking lovely tonight, dear. (*Moving toward stairway.*) But oughtn't you be wearing pearls with that dress?

RHODA (*helplessly*)

Oh . . . I forgot. . . . I can't seem to remember anything. (*Pursuing her own thought.*) Do you know, I've just remembered where I've seen Prince Sirki before. Not the Prince, of course, but a face like his. It was in a dream I had in a hospital. . . . I was supposed to be dying.

ALDA

Stop it Rhoda, you're getting morbid.

RHODA (*pitifully*)

I've felt like praying all day. Why should I, just because a Prince is visiting? (*Suddenly.*) Alda! (*In a strange voice.*) Look, those are the same roses that were in the bowl the day the Prince came. I remember that odd one. . . .

ALDA

But . . .

RHODA

They haven't withered at all!

ALDA

But it's only three days.

RHODA (*in the same strange tone*)

And one of the gardeners said, this morning, that things were growing as he never saw them. He said that

not a leaf had fallen. . . . (*She points fearfully toward the rear window.*) Alda . . . the vines . . . are trying to burst their way into the house! . . . What does it mean?

ALDA (*strangely*)

I don't know. . . . Life, Rhoda . . .

[RHODA *starts away from her, with a stifled scream.*

RHODA

Oh . . . he's coming! I can feel it!

[*She begins to run blindly toward the door.*

ALDA (*sharply*)

Rhoda . . . stop!

[RHODA *pulls up just as the* SHADOW *appears in the doorway. He moves with an air of magnificence.* ALDA *goes toward the stairs. As she meets the* PRINCE *she bows.*

ALDA

Your Highness.

[*She goes upstairs.* RHODA, *in a panic, starts to follow.*

SHADOW (*as* RHODA *rushes toward him*)

Going, Miss Fenton? Or were you running into my arms?

RHODA (*with difficulty*)

Forgive me, Your Highness. . . . There was something I had forgotten. . . .

SHADOW

Ah, then it wasn't just a pretty compliment. I'm sorry.

RHODA

I have just remembered that I left my pearls lying on a table. I was afraid some servant might be tempted.

SHADOW

Tempted?

ALDA

They're rather valuable.

SHADOW

Of course. I forgot, for a moment. In my country pearls haven't the same value. But tell me, Miss Fenton, why is the absence of a few pearls so important?

RHODA (*deeply*)

I wish to look my best for Your Highness. I'll get them. [*She starts away, suddenly.*

SHADOW

Miss Fenton. (*She pauses and turns.*) I am not much interested in ornaments. Unless, of course, you *want* to leave me. Do you?

RHODA (*hesitantly*)

I . . . I wish I might . . . never . . .

SHADOW (*going to her*)

That is so nice. I have had great pleasure in watching you these three days. You are so young, and graceful, and strong.

RHODA

Oh!

SHADOW (*continuing*)

And you move as freely as an unhurrying wind. It is a delight to watch. And there is something about you of the freshness of the morning star.

RHODA

Oh, Your Highness . . .

SHADOW (*smiling*)

You know, it is peculiarly refreshing to me to be near some one who is so very fit.

RHODA

Why?

SHADOW

Well, the oddness in that is a little obscure. But, believe me, it is there.

RHODA

Your Highness so often speaks in riddles.

SHADOW

Yes. A game I play for my amusement. You see, I have known so much of illness that I take a singular interest in all young and budding life . . . in vigor, in bloom. It quite stirs me. (*He stands as though listening to his sensations.*) Yes, it undoubtedly stirs me.

RHODA (*breathlessly, after a pause*)

Oh, please don't stop!

SHADOW

In what key shall I go on?

RHODA

Say anything!

SHADOW

Very well. Miss Fenton, what is love?

RHODA (*startled*)

Love?

SHADOW

Yes, love. The thing of which you are thinking so earnestly, just now.

RHODA (*hesitant*)

Why . . .

SHADOW

Tell me. Don't be afraid. What does it mean to you?

RHODA

Why . . . to find some . . . some splendid man, who loves you, too. . . .

SHADOW (*smiling*)

Like myself, perhaps?

RHODA

Yes. And . . . and to live with him . . . the rest of your life.

SHADOW

Thank you. You have done bravely. (*The* SHADOW *is*

speaking with a growing intensity.) But . . . if the rest of one's life were only a few days . . . or a few hours . . . would that be enough to justify . . . love?

RHODA (*frightened*)

You mean . . . if one of them should . . .

SHADOW (*continuing*)

And if, after those few hours, they should go a great way off, where they should live like two beams of light . . . with the swiftness and clarity of light. Would that be enough?

RHODA (*frightened*)

Your Highness . . . I don't understand!

SHADOW (*intensely*)

Suppose . . . when their bodies had clung together for an hour that they must live, for the rest of time, like two thoughts, communing together in pure silence. Would you choose such love? Have you enough courage?

(*He is looking into her eyes with burning directness.* RHODA *draws back with a smothered cry. He stops her with a laugh, then takes her hand.*)

No, I must not frighten you. I have your answer.

RHODA

What have I said?

SHADOW

A great deal. You see, my dear, yours is only a vague calling of the blood, the effect of exercise and open

air. . . . Very beautiful, no doubt, and prophetic of a healthy human race, but . . .

RHODA (*brokenly*)

Oh, Your Highness . . . I have disappointed you!

SHADOW

It is my fault. I asked too much. (*He bows in dismissal.*) I hope you find your pearls quite safe, Miss Fenton. (*She starts away.*) And . . . when next we meet do not be afraid. Those who know me best have found that there is nothing to fear.

[*She exits. He turns to the fireplace, thinking deeply. After a moment* ALDA *comes down the stairs. She hesitates, then speaks.*

ALDA

Your Highness.

[*He turns quickly, and goes to her.*

SHADOW

Oh, there you are. I'm so glad you've come. Miss Fenton was afraid, but you are not. Will you tell me why?

ALDA

Oh, but I am.

[*She sits on the divan.*

SHADOW

You conceal it bravely.

ALDA

Perhaps my interest is greater than my fear.

SHADOW

Why are you . . . interested?

[*He goes close and stands looking down at her, with brilliant compelling eyes.* ALDA *finds it difficult to speak.*

ALDA (*slowly, as though for away*)

Because you are the most fascinating . . . the most compelling . . . the most royal man. . . . And I am a woman.

[*The* SHADOW *considers her a moment, then turns swiftly and touches a button which dims the lights. He goes quickly and sits beside her.*

SHADOW (*intensely*)

Yes . . . a beautiful woman. And between this man and this woman life is passing.

ALDA (*bravely*)

Yes. . . . Life that is immense . . . and terrible . . . drawing me . . .

SHADOW

You are an interesting woman, Alda.

ALDA (*faintly*)

Am I?

SHADOW

Shall I tell you what you are?

ALDA

Yes.

SHADOW

You have lost many illusions, but you cling to one, hoping it is not an illusion. Do you know what it is?

ALDA

Yes.

SHADOW

You have sought experience, but none has satisfied you, yet. You long for something wild . . . overpowering, to sweep you beyond thought.

ALDA (*faintly*)

Yes.

SHADOW

Shall I read you further? You are an open book to me.

ALDA

Yes.

SHADOW

I have been listening to the sound of you. On the surface there are many little sounds, graceful and charming. And beneath, one simple and primitive sound. I am hearing it now. (*He is exerting all his charm.*) Shall I go on?

ALDA (*closing her eyes*)

Yes.

SHADOW

You do not know who I am, and my mystery attracts you, and stirs your desire. I can see it now, throbbing

in your blood. . . . I can see it rising like a sob in your throat.

[ALDA *puts one hand quickly to her throat. She is now a bird caught by a snake's eyes.*

ALDA

Oh. . . .

SHADOW (*with sinister intensity*)

The unknown is drawing you. I wonder . . . if I were to tell you who I am . . .

ALDA (*faintly*)

Who . . . are you?

SHADOW

Ah, could you bear that, you, a mortal?

ALDA (*shrinking*)

A mortal?

SHADOW

I wonder if your passion is great enough. You desire me now. You are quivering at the thought of my touch. I can feel you calling to me. If I were to kiss you. (*He kisses her.*) Ah . . . now you are caught up into the dark current of my being. Shall I call you back, or will you go on . . . and on?

ALDA (*half swooning*)

On . . .

SHADOW (*triumphantly*)

Ah . . . then I *can* feed your desire!

ALDA

Yes.

SHADOW

You do desire me?

ALDA

Yes.

SHADOW

How much?

ALDA

More than life itself.

SHADOW

I wonder . . . You are not afraid?

ALDA

No.

SHADOW

Let me see. (*He lifts her face.*) Look into my eyes! Look deep! What do you see there?

ALDA (*fearfully*)

Shadows!

SHADOW

Look into that shadow. Let your thought go to its wildest reach . . . I *will* you to know who I am.

ALDA (*in sharp fear*)

No . . . no!

SHADOW (*intensely*)

You, who were not afraid! . . . You desired me as a mortal, say my immortal name and see if you desire me still!

ALDA (*near fainting*)

I . . . can't!

SHADOW

Say it!

ALDA

Oh . . . pity me!

SHADOW

Say it!

ALDA

You are . . . Oh . . .

[*She screams and falls in a half faint on the sofa. He laughs in sardonic bitterness.*

SHADOW (*rising after a pause*)

Ah . . . it wasn't love with you, only passion. You were flaming, but at the sound of my name lust grew cold, and that is not the measure of love. You're not great enough for me, Alda. I am looking for a response you could never give. I am searching for some one who knows, and is not afraid.

ALDA

Oh . . . oh . . .

SHADOW (*after a pause, in a changed tone*)

Forgive me, I had to do this. There was something I wanted to know, and you have told me. (*He takes a few restless steps.* ALDA *watches him fearfully. He speaks half to her and half to himself, with a deep intensity.*) I wanted to know and feel so much! And I

have . . . a lifetime, many lifetimes, in three days. Because I was so avid of life my senses have drained it. (*He takes a rose from the bowl.*) Even this flower. . . . No one will ever know its fragrance as I have. None could know . . . but Death. (ALDA *rises and rushes fearfully from the room. He is so absorbed that he doesn't notice.*) But there is another flower . . . more fragrant than this . . . which I haven't plucked. I've been afraid! . . . But I *must* pluck it! Until then I haven't lived. And I will not end these days in failure!

[*He stands before the fireplace, his head on his hands.* GRAZIA *dressed in white, looking lovely and buoyant, enters from the garden.*

GRAZIA (*after a moment*)

Well . . . here we are!

[*He turns quickly and goes to her.*

SHADOW

Yes . . . here we are.

GRAZIA (*happily*)

Your very Serene Highness.

[*She makes a curtsey.*

SHADOW

Oh, please! Titles are too formal for you and me.

GRAZIA (*simply*)

How shall I call you, then?

SHADOW

Well, my name is Vasili Stephan Nicholas Sirki Alexander Alexandrovitch.

GRAZIA (*smiling*)

But I couldn't call you that.

SHADOW

I have one name which no one has ever used . . . Boris.

GRAZIA

But I shouldn't dare.

SHADOW

Not if I asked it? Try.

GRAZIA (*very low*)

Boris.

[*The* SHADOW *laughs happily.*

SHADOW

There, you see, it was quite simple. And it has a delightful sound.

(*He seats her in a chair near the table and leans above her. His voice is throbbing with tenderness.*)

The very serene and lovely Princess of all delight!

GRAZIA

I like to be called Grazia . . . by my friends.

SHADOW

And I'm included! How charming of you . . . Grazia, then.

GRAZIA (*in a strange tone*)

You make it sound like music.

SHADOW

It *is* like music. . . . It has overtones that go sing-

ing on and on. . . . But they are not sad. They're full of grace and light.

GRAZIA (*wide-eyed*)

Oh . . . when you speak like that . . . I hear music, too . . . great sweeping chords. . . .

SHADOW (*kneeling by her*)

I could say so much more. . . .

GRAZIA

Your Highness is being very kind tonight.

[*The* SHADOW *starts and his face contracts with pain. There is a brief pause.*

SHADOW

I wonder if I am being . . . *kind.*

GRAZIA

Perhaps I should have said . . . gracious.

SHADOW (*recovering his light tone*)

No . . . not gracious, either. I have discovered that even the mightiest must sue for certain . . . favors.

GRAZIA (*with a pleased laugh*)

I should think Your Highness would never need to sue.

SHADOW (*deeply*)

On the contrary. I am feeling strangely humble, for the first time in my life.

[*The* DUKE *enters with the* MAJOR WHITRED *and pauses to switch on the lights.*

GRAZIA

And I am feeling strangely thrilled . . . and proud.

DUKE

Grazia, your mother is asking for you.

[*The* DUKE's *face is strained and his tone is grave.*

SHADOW (*evenly*)

We have just been exchanging compliments, the little Princess and I. It is a very pretty custom of your society.

DUKE

I'm sure Your Highness is accomplished.

GRAZIA (*going to the* DUKE)

Oh, he is. And he makes his pretty speeches sound so . . . significant.

DUKE

I don't wonder. You're looking lovely tonight, dear. I'm sorry you have to leave us, but your mother is asking for you.

GRAZIA

I ought not to have left her. . . . Will you forgive me?

[*She curtseys and exits. The three men stand watching her.*

[MAJOR WHITRED *is a lean, tanned distinguished soldier about forty. He wears the dress uniform of the Foreign Legion, his breast covered with medals.*

DUKE

Your Highness, may I present Major Whitred of the Foreign Legion. His Highness, Prince Sirki.

MAJOR (*eagerly*)

I've been awfully anxious to meet you, sir.

SHADOW (*drily*)

So I've noticed.

MAJOR

Oh . . . ?

SHADOW (*going to him*)

I feel that I already know the Major. We have nearly met, several times.

MAJOR

I assure you sir, it's not my fault that we haven't.

SHADOW

Nor mine. I am always ready to meet a soldier and a good fellow.

MAJOR

It's odd, really, that we've missed each other. I'm familiar with your region and your name.

SHADOW (*smiling*)

Ah, indeed you are a traveler!

MAJOR

Yes, Siberia, isn't it? I was out there with the White Russian Army, just on the border, of course.

SHADOW

On the border. Yes, that would explain your return.

DUKE (*enjoying this. He starts away*)

I think you'll find the Major a man after your own heart, Your Highness. Like yourself, his job has taken him to all parts of the world.

[*Exit the* DUKE.

SHADOW

I've known a good many legionaires, but usually on the field.

MAJOR

Quite so, sir. We generally stay there.

SHADOW

That, also, has not escaped my notice.

MAJOR (*laughing*)

We're a mad lot, I'm afraid. It's a wonder I'm still here. Been nodding good morning to Death for a long while, now. I've stood uncomfortably close to him, several times.

SHADOW (*smiling*)

Why do you say "uncomfortably close" when you have so often sought a closer acquaintance?

MAJOR (*with a laugh*)

Well, hardly that. I suppose it's the danger that's attractive. I don't mean to say one's never afraid. Personally I'm often petrified. Of course, most of the legionaires are trying to say goodbye. They've got

into trouble, or a woman's gone back on them. They've messed things up, somehow. But no matter how glad we'd be to get out, we always feel a bit chilly when the Old Man comes to fetch us, don't we?

SHADOW (*haughtily*)

I beg your pardon? The Old Man? Oh, yes . . . the Old Man. (*He laughs suddenly.*) Sit down, Major. (*They sit.*) You do not know how funny, that is. Tell me . . . what do your friends in the legion expect to find when they say goodbye?

MAJOR

Why . . . six feet of earth, I should think . . . and a good rest. And no more parades.

SHADOW

Is that all?

MAJOR

Well, of course they'll be safe from the women.

SHADOW

Safe! . . . Oh, I see. It appears, then, that love makes a man either wish to live or to die.

MAJOR

That's about it. As for what comes after, fighting chaps don't think much about it. Better leave mysteries like that alone, don't you think?

SHADOW

But they are never left alone. Fear is the proof of that. And religion builds fantastic pictures to still that

fear and to make life seem less hard. But has it never occurred to you, Major, that death may be only more simple than life, and perhaps more desirable?

MAJOR (*after a pause*)

Odd, you should say that. You know, sometimes, when I've been in a tight place, I've had a curious sort of inspiration. It may have been just the excitement, of course, the intoxication of danger.

SHADOW

Perhaps it was revelation.

MAJOR (*slowly*)

Yes. And once I had a curious dream when I was wounded. I was standing alone, at the top of the world, on an icy peak, and all the mysteries seemed clear to me. I knew all truth for a moment, and was utterly content. Since then I have felt that death may be a high adventure, a magnificent discovery . . . a glorious freedom.

[*He is rather embarrassed at saying this.*

SHADOW

Permit me to say, you are a very fortunate man.

MAJOR

I suppose it's the unknown that bothers us . . . and the parting. Personally, there isn't any one who cares very much where or when I go. But usually there is. . . .

SHADOW (*after a pause, struck by some thought*)

The parting! Yes . . . when some one must be left

behind. (*He rises, bows formally, indicating that the audience is over.*) Thank you, Major, this has been very interesting. We shall meet again, of course.

MAJOR

Happy to meet you any time.
[*Exits. The* DUKE *enters.*

DUKE

Your Highness. She is a lovely child. I hope that one day she and Corrado . . .

SHADOW (*with a stern gesture*)

What is the program for tonight, my dear Duke?

DUKE

As you see, I have invited such guests as I thought might interest you. Later there will be a little entertainment. If Your Highness has any wish . . . I should like you to be pleased.

SHADOW (*restless and distrait*)

You are very kind. I'm afraid it has all been a strain.

DUKE

Oh, please . . .

SHADOW

It has, I know . . . and now . . . (*Abruptly.*) Tell me . . . do any of your guests know?

DUKE

None, Your Highness.

SHADOW (*almost harshly*)

Good. I wish that reserve kept, without fail.

DUKE

I understand.

SHADOW

No, forgive me, but you do not. I have been experimenting and I find that no mortal could bear the knowledge . . . no mortal woman . . .

DUKE (*startled*)

Is there anything . . . I can . . . do?

SHADOW

No, except not to interfere.

DUKE (*with difficulty*)

Forgive me, but I do not understand. . . .

SHADOW

Naturally. And when you do . . . (*He laughs with a suddenly, almost insane intensity.*) You asked me once if this were a masquerade. It was at first. I was playing a game for my amusement. I thought I was free to choose this or that pleasure. . . . But now I am caught, and being carried blindly toward . . .

DUKE (*bravely*)

Toward what . . . Your Highness?

SHADOW

Toward something I had not foreseen. . . . Toward that which gives life its meaning, and its grandeur . . . Toward that which makes men build and hope . . . Toward . . .

DUKE (*dreading to hear the word*)

Yes?

SHADOW

Love.

DUKE (*terrified*)

Love?

SHADOW (*with sudden, sardonic laugh*)

That's strange to you, is it not? But it's infinitely stranger to me. . . . I, who am called the destroyer of life, now wish to love and cherish life . . . to hold it tenderly . . . and passionately.

DUKE

But . . . do you love . . . a mortal?

SHADOW (*ironically*)

I said . . . passionately. . . . Does that indicate a bloodless ghost?

DUKE

But . . . Your Highness . . . what will happen when you . . .

SHADOW

You think perhaps I am being cruel . . .

DUKE

This is . . . horrible . . .

SHADOW (*intensely restless*)

Perhaps I *am* being cruel. . . . I don't know. . . . But isn't that proof of my mortality? . . . Does

your mortal lover think and weigh? He plunders where he can, knowing that there will be an end. Does it matter if that end is one day or ten years?

DUKE (*in agony*)

But it is fatal to love you!

SHADOW

Have you forgotten that tonight I must go, with empty hands?

DUKE

Are you sure?

SHADOW (*austerely*)

I am an expert at . . . conclusions . . . my friend. (*He considers the* DUKE. *His voice is strained and sharp.*) Don't look at me with that fear in your eyes! I tell you it is I who am afraid! (*He laughs wildly.*) This is what my caprice has brought me to. I came to sip and taste your pleasures, to find what meaning they had that makes you cling to life. And I have found it. . . . It is love, and the hope of winning love. And now I am caught and bound, until this borrowed blood of mine is aching with an intolerable pain. (*He laughs again.*) I, who was invincible, have found a stronger thing than I!

DUKE

Will you tell me . . . who?

SHADOW (*suddenly*)

No, I will not tell you. But understand this, clearly. I will not be thwarted. I should not wish to repay your

kindness with disaster, but, I warn you, no one must hinder me. Is that clear?

DUKE (*swallowing hard*)

Yes. . . .

SHADOW

Thank you.

[*He bows coldly and starts toward the garden. Enter* BARON *and* CORRADO. *The* BARON *tries to interrupt the* SHADOW'S *progress.*

BARON

Oh, my dear Prince. (*He assumes a statesman like air.*) I've been hoping to find you to continue our conversation on international relationships . . .

SHADOW (*he checks the* BARON *with a motion of his hand, then lifts it as though he were giving a toast*)

My dear Baron, I give you beauty and love and ecstasy.

[*He exits into the garden.*

BARON

What's the matter with the Prince?

[*The* DUKE *comes suddenly to life. He hurries over to the* BARON *and* CORRADO.

DUKE (*to the* BARON *in sharp fear*)

Where is Alda?

BARON

Couldn't tell you. . . . About somewhere. But Lambert, the Prince . . .

DUKE (*to* CORRADO)

Where's Grazia?

CORRADO

With her mother. Why, what's wrong, Father?

DUKE (*with quiet desperation*)

Everything! Something terrible!

BARON

I thought the Prince didn't seem himself.

CORRADO

I saw Alda going upstairs, looking ill.

BARON (*sharply*)

Ill?

DUKE

Oh God, if it should be Grazia!

CORRADA

Father, what is it?

BARON

I must go and see about Alda.

DUKE

Wait!

CORRADO (*wildly*)

Don't keep me in suspense.

DUKE (*breathing heavily*)

His Highness . . . has just told me . . . Oh, it's too incredible . . . too monstrous!

CORRADO (*catching his arm*)

Tell me . . . quickly!

DUKE

He loves . . . a guest . . . in this house!

BARON

Ah, that's what he meant!

DUKE (*wildly*)

But you don't know what that means . . . you can't, because you don't know who he is. But I know.

CORRADO

Isn't he Prince Sirki?

BARON

He can't have Alda. I won't allow it.

CORRADO

Father, it isn't Grazia!

DUKE

I don't know who it is. He wouldn't tell me. But he's mad with it. And he said . . . that if any one tried to stop him . . .

CORRADO

By God, I will, if it's Grazia.

DUKE

You don't understand! You can't! There's nothing to be done!

CORRADO

Yes, there is. We can stay near them, so that he can't see them alone.

DUKE (*quickly*)

But we must not offend him.

CORRADO

I don't understand. Oh . . . what *is* all this mystery? Father what can he do?

DUKE (*a pause*)

Oh God . . . anything. . . . But he promised he wouldn't harm the one he loved. He said we should all be safe, if we didn't interfere.

BARON

But I can't believe he could do us any harm.

DUKE

He can. He can destroy us all.

CORRADO

Father, can't you explain?

DUKE

No, I can't . . . but, go and stay near Alda. . . . And Grazia . . . Stay close to them. Don't let them out of your sight. It's all we can do.

[*He exits slowly.*

BARON (*leaving*)

The world's gone mad, it seems to me, quite mad.

[CORRADO *stands uncertainly. After a moment* GRAZIA *comes slowly from the garden, walking as though in a dream. Exit the* BARON.

CORRADO (*relieved*)

Oh, Grazia . . . I'm so glad to find you!

GRAZIA

Why, dear?

[GRAZIA *speaks as though from a great distance. Her voice is gentle, but as impersonal as pure sound.*

CORRADO (*with difficulty*)

Aren't you going in for the entertainment?

GRAZIA

No, not now.

CORRADO (*hesitantly*)

Will you . . . do me a great favor?

GRAZIA

Of course.

CORRADO

May I stay very close to you this evening?

GRAZIA

Why?

CORRADO (*with difficulty*)

Because . . . I love you . . . and I'm afraid!

GRAZIA

But there's nothing to be afraid of.

CORRADO (*desperately*)

Oh . . . why are you so strange?

GRAZIA

I seem to be waiting for something.

CORRADO

Let me stay with you.

GRAZIA

It's not you I'm waiting for, Corrado.

CORRADO (*desperately*)

Oh, Grazia . . . you're so far away! Please come back to me! I'm in terror for you. Grazia, there's some awful danger . . . Father said . . .

GRAZIA

Oh no . . . not danger . . . happiness. . . . Something I have been waiting for—so long.

CORRADO

Oh God!

GRAZIA (*gently*)

Please don't be unhappy, Corrado. I love you, in some way I can't make clear. If I didn't feel so far away I should be in your arms, crying, and holding you close to me. I want to do that, but I think I never shall.

[*She shivers.* CORRADO *is in terror.*

CORRADO

Grazia. . . . You're trembling!

GRAZIA

I'm only a little cold. Will you get my cloak from the hall?

CORRADO

I don't want to leave you. Won't you come with me?

GRAZIA

No, I must wait here. (CORRADO *turns reluctantly but is recalled.*) Corrado. . . .

[GRAZIA *takes a step, and putting her arms around his neck, kisses him. He clings to her trembling.*

CORRADO

Oh Grazia . . . I love you so!

[*After a moment* GRAZIA *kisses him on the forehead and withdraws.*

GRAZIA (*gently*)

Now go . . . dear.

[CORRADO *turns and rushes from the room.* GRAZIA *looks after him for a moment, then slowly mounts the steps, and sits on the bench. Presently the* SHADOW *approaches, slowly, from the garden. He stands looking down at her.*

SHADOW

Why are you not with the guests?

[*In a limpid, happy tone.*

GRAZIA

For the same reason that you're not, I think.

SHADOW

You say that so simply, as though you knew.

GRAZIA

I do know.

SHADOW

It's strange . . . We hardly need to speak, do we?

GRAZIA

Thoughts are so much clearer than words.

SHADOW

Then perhaps you can tell me what I've been doing in the garden?

GRAZIA

I think I can . . . almost.

SHADOW

Tell me. I want to hear it from your lips.

[GRAZIA *speaks slowly with a curious clarity and simplicity of voice.*

GRAZIA

I think you have been holding life in your hands, as I do sometimes . . . I think you have been a little afraid of its beauty.

SHADOW (*trembling*)

Ah, you do know! You wonderful, exquisite child! (*He kneels and takes her hand.* GRAZIA *seems hardly breathing as she looks up into his face.*)
I have been walking in a garden that was full of you, and under a sky that sang of you . . . Your laughter was in a wind that went by and touched my hair . . . I knelt by a yellow flower, and out of its heart came a sound that was your voice . . . I put my ear to the ground, and heard your footsteps moving toward me, across the world. And the earth was trembling under your little feet . . . I stood looking at the sky, and the night was illumined by the knowledge of you . . . And I was *shaken.*

GRAZIA (*as though from a distance*)

And ever since I saw you, I have been shaken. . . .

Oh, what is this that has happened? Who . . . are you?

SHADOW (*trembling*)

Sirki . . .

GRAZIA (*shaking her head*)

I don't mean that. . . . You seem to come from a distant place—

SHADOW

I do come from far away . . . but . . .

GRAZIA

When I'm with you I see depths in your eyes that are like the worlds I visit in sleep. . . . And beneath your words there is a sound that I've heard in dreams, and sometimes when there is a storm in the mountains. . . . And when you leave me the light goes from the sky. (*She gives a little shaken laugh.*) You seem like the mystery that is just beyond sight and sound . . . always just beyond my reach. . . . Something that draws . . . and frightens me.

[*The* SHADOW *puts his arms about her. His voice is shaken with emotion.*

SHADOW

Oh Grazia . . . Grazia . . . don't be afraid of me! . . . I am Sirki who loves you! . . . More than any man could love you! I am Sirki, who needs your warmth and your beauty more than any man could need them. I say your name over and over, until its music runs through all my being. . . . Your hands are white jasmine flowers in the sun. (*He covers her*

hands with kisses. GRAZIA *is near to fainting.*) Grazia . . . listen to me. I am a great power, and I am humble before you. . . . And tonight I must go back to my . . . distant kingdom.

GRAZIA (*far away*)

Will you take me?

[*The impact of her words is startling. He rises as though shocked beyond speech.*

SHADOW

Take . . . you . . .

GRAZIA

Yes. I should be so unhappy, alone.

SHADOW

Take . . . you . . . (*With sudden intensity.*) No . . . no! Don't tempt me! (*He lifts her and takes her in his arms.*) But Grazia, give me one hour of you! Let me hold you once, and feel your life! You are the meaning of beauty that I must know. Grazia, let me hold you, and feel that last ecstasy . . . and know that I have lived!

GRAZIA

Oh, my love, my love!

SHADOW

My little love!

[*He kisses her, a long kiss. Then they go off slowly, his arms about her. Enter the* DUKE *right. He sees them as they go off and rushes to the steps, then turns in terror, his hands over his face.*

DUKE (*despairing*)

It is . . . Grazia!

[*Enter* CORRADO *with* GRAZIA'S *cloak. He pauses.*

CORRADO

Father . . . what is it?

DUKE (*hardly able to speak*)

It is nothing.

CORRADO

Where's Grazia?

DUKE

She . . . she went into the garden.

CORRADO

I must take her cloak to her.

[*He starts up the stairs.*

DUKE

You can't!

CORRADO (*struggling with his fear*)

Can't . . . why? Is some one with her?

[*He comes down, putting the cloak over a chair.*

DUKE

Yes, Prince Sirki.

CORRADO (*in growing terror*)

Then it *is* Grazia . . . that he . . .

DUKE

Yes.

CORRADO

Oh God! I've felt her slipping away from me. . . . She's fascinated, and he . . . he's cruel . . . I know he is. . . . Father, we can't let him take Grazia. (*His voice rises to a shout.*) We must save her from him.

DUKE

We can do nothing.

CORRADO (*shouting*)

Don't stand there and say that! We *must* do something! We can go out there together and take him by the throat.

DUKE

If we could, should I be standing here?

CORRADO

For God's sake, don't say that again! I'm going! [*He starts toward the garden. Enter* STEPHANIE *and the* PRINCESS.

STEPHANIE

Lambert . . . what is it?

CORRADO (*wildly*)

Grazia's gone out into the garden with Prince Sirki.

PRINCESS (*falling onto divan*)

Oh Grazia . . . Grazia.

[*Enter* ERIC *and the* MAJOR.

DUKE

Grazia is in no danger.

ERIC

What's happened, sir?

DUKE (*he speaks with difficulty, without conviction*)

Grazia . . . and Prince Sirki . . . have gone into the garden. . . . There is nothing to be alarmed about.

CORRADO (*after a pause*)

But you're alarmed, Father, you're terrified. I must know why.

PRINCESS

Lambert, let me go to her!

DUKE

No . . . no . . . wait!

CORRADO

Then I'll go.
[*He starts away.*

DUKE (*shouting*)

I forbid you to move!
[*They stand facing one another.*

CORRADO

Then tell me why I can't go. (*Comes down to table.*)
Give me your reason.

DUKE

I can't . . .

CORRADO

Grazia's in some danger, I know it.

PRINCESS

Where have they gone?

DUKE

No!

CORRADO

You *will* tell me, or by God I'll kill him.

DUKE (*in sudden hysteria*)

You can't kill him. . . . But he can kill us. If he but puts out his hand, all of us . . .

CORRADO

Who *is* this Prince?

DUKE

You don't know what you are asking.

CORRADO

And I don't care. I only know that Grazia's in danger.

DUKE

You're risking your life, and I'm risking mine.

CORRADO

What's your life or mine? You said you would die for Grazia.

DUKE

I would, if that would save her.

CORRADO

Then tell me what you know!

STEPHANIE (*suddenly*)

No, Lambert, no!

PRINCESS (*moaning*)

Save Grazia! Save Grazia!

DUKE (*after a pause*)

Very well, I'll tell you. . . . He said if I reveal his secret he will leave instantly as Sirki, and return as . . . Steel yourselves, if you are to hear it. . . . He is not Prince Sirki. He is the one who waits. . . . The one whom all men dread. (*Hysterically.*) His Majesty . . . *Death* . . . amusing himself, on a holiday!

PRINCESS

Grazia . . . Grazia . . .

[*She starts toward the garden as the curtain falls.*

CURTAIN

ACT THREE

ACT THREE

Scene: The same.

Time: Eleven-thirty the same night.

At rise: THE DUKE, STEPHANIE, THE BARON, ERIC, *the* MAJOR *and* CORRADO *are on the stage, looking as though they had been staring at* DEATH *for hours.*

After a silence ERIC *goes up to steps and looks out, then crosses.*

ERIC

If only he would come, if he *must* come, and get it over.

CORRADO (*despairing*)

And bring Grazia.

MAJOR

Waiting for the zero hour, or going over the top is child's play, compared to this.

ERIC

If there were only something one could do.

MAJOR

Yes. It's easy enough to meet danger when your blood's up. But dread, like this, is slow poison, eating away your courage.

CORRADO (*pitifully*)

Oh, how much longer will it be?

ERIC

There's a half hour before he goes.

CORRADO

It's like slow drowning . . .

[*The telephone rings, the* DUKE *answers.*

DUKE

Yes, Marie . . .

CORRADO

Grazia, Father . . .

DUKE

No, Corrado . . . (*In the phone.*) Then oughtn't you be with us? I think you had better come.

[*He hangs up.*

CORRADO

Father . . . is there? . . .

DUKE

No, she has not been seen.

CORRADO

Oh, Grazia . . .

STEPHANIE

Do you think . . . he will come?

DUKE

Yes.

BARON

But how can we face him?

DUKE

We must. . . . Try, all of you, to think of him as Prince Sirki. Perhaps that's impossible, but if you could . . .

MAJOR

But need you all be here? I mean . . . couldn't you go and let me . . .

DUKE

You'd face him alone, for us?

MAJOR (*embarrassed*)

Why, yes, I'm rather used to that, you know.

DUKE

That's very good of you, my dear fellow. But don't you see, it would be useless.

STEPHANIE

And if any one is afraid, he will know that you . . . told . . . Oh Lambert!

CORRADO

Forgive me, sir, for insisting that you tell. I didn't know the danger.

DUKE

It's all right, Corrado. No one could have known.

CORRADO

I thought I might save . . . Grazia. . . . But now I've risked your life for nothing. . . .

DUKE

You weren't to blame.

ERIC

You know, we have been facing him for two hours in our minds. Perhaps it won't be so difficult when he does come.

MAJOR

Much easier, of course. There's something inspiring about danger when it's right in front of you. I wonder if it's because we really know that . . . that what's beyond is inspiring, too?

BARON (*after a pause*)

I thought I'd found my youth again, but it was only his holiday. I'd stopped dying, that's all. Now my holiday's over. Tomorrow I'll be older than ever. I might as well go with him tonight.

STEPHANIE (*her voice breaking*)

Oh . . . please.

BARON

Don't cry, my dear. It's the way life must go. I've known too much, and seen too much, and when you're old as I am there is only a little difference between. . . . And I'll know soon.

[*The* BARON *exits slowly.*

STEPHANIE

Lambert . . . will he surely come?

DUKE (*ironically*)

I think he will come and say goodbye to his friends.

CORRADO

But Grazia . . .

DUKE

I don't know. Perhaps he will be kind. Or he may take Grazia . . . or me.

STEPHANIE

You!

DUKE

Or all of us. . . . We must be prepared.

ERIC

Don't trouble sir, we have enough courage for that.
[*Exits.*

MAJOR

Of course we have. Do you know, I think we may all be wrong to be afraid. I talked with him tonight about dying, and he said "Has it ever occurred to you that death may be only simpler than life, and infinitely more kind?"

DUKE

He said . . . that?

MAJOR

Yes. And when he spoke I had a curious feeling that—somehow he knew.

[*Exits. There is a sudden silence and a movement of fear as the* SHADOW *is seen approaching from the garden. He enters slowly and considers the group. Their attempt to meet him bravely indicates that they know who he is. The* SHADOW *carries on his arm his black cloak which he throws over the back of a chair.*

SHADOW (*to the* DUKE)

So, you have broken your promise.

DUKE

I was desperate, sir. It was my son's life against my promise. I had no choice.

SHADOW

I am not used to these distinctions.

DUKE

It was my life or my son's, sir. If you insist on the penalty, I am ready.

SHADOW (*after a pause*)

I see. You had no choice. (STEPHANIE *drops on divan. The* SHADOW *considers them sadly.*) I thought we should part as friends, with kindly remembrances, but now my shadow has come between us.

DUKE (*after a pause*)

Your Highness!

SHADOW (*going to him*)

What do you wish of me?

DUKE

It is Grazia. . . . She has not come in. (*The* DUKE *looks at him in a sudden fear.*) Surely you haven't . . . already?

SHADOW

I am Sirki, for a few moments still.

[*He sits by the table in evident pain of spirit.*

DUKE

Then may I ask? (*He pauses and looks into the* SHADOW's *face.*) Ah, now *you* are suffering.

SHADOW

What do *you* know of suffering?

DUKE

I've known something of it these past three days.

SHADOW

Yes, of course. I've been so absorbed in my own trouble that I forgot. And yet I have not forgotten. My own pain has taught me what human suffering can be. (*He rises and walks about like a caged lion.*) This is the end of my holiday. In a few moments I shall be summoned and my wild prank will be over. I thought I could be a mortal and yet greater than my mortality. I had not reckoned with the power of love. Now I have looked at the sun, and I am blinded. I have lost my way!

DUKE

And must we lose Grazia?

SHADOW (*laughing*)

The irony of this is magnificent. I am the Lord of endings. And now I am caught in my own net. Men are sad because I am in the world, and there must be an end and a frustration. And in a few moments I shall be what I was, and for me too there will be an end. . . .

DUKE

But you . . . you are above loss and pain.

SHADOW

Am I, and still a mortal? I thought tonight that I had reached the end of my experiment. I had found love. But it was not the end. Beyond that I have found the pain of the loss of love . . . if I must lose it . . .

DUKE

But it *must* be lost to you.

SHADOW

Why?

DUKE

Because you are . . .

SHADOW

Death . . . (*His tone becomes light, ironical.*) My dear Duke . . . thank you for defining the problem. I have been talking a little wildly, but you have brought me back to earth. The situation is this: You do not wish to give up Grazia . . . neither do I. It is as simple as that, and as profound as the sadness of all parting.

DUKE

But her friends . . . her mother?

[*Enter the* PRINCESS *through the garden. She walks as though she were in despair. The* SHADOW *is standing with his back to the fireplace.*

PRINCESS (*to the* DUKE)

Has Grazia come?

DUKE

No.

PRINCESS

Has he . . . ? (*She goes and stands before the* SHADOW.) I thought . . . you might bring her home . . . I waited . . . praying. Every moment I thought . . . They're coming through the garden. They're at the door. . . . Every moment I thought, that is Grazia's voice. She's safe . . . I sat . . . holding a dress she wore today. . . . Your Highness, won't you give her back to me?

SHADOW

I meant to do that. (*Stifled "Oh" from the* PRINCESS.) I thought I could take love for an hour, and go. . . . But now . . .

PRINCESS

But you couldn't be so cruel. You would leave much terror behind . . . such madness.

SHADOW

Your pain against mine. Your sadness against my immeasurable regret.

PRINCESS

Mine would be immeasurable, too. Your Highness, I bore her. She is flesh of my flesh. I have tended her life and watched it grow.

SHADOW

You bore her and gave her to life. And life must be free to choose.

PRINCESS

Yes, I gave her to life. . . . Not to . . .

SHADOW (*harshly*)

Why should I deny myself because of your childish fear? You know nothing of love, nor the meaning of death. . . . You know nothing of this child. You are speaking of your own need, not hers.

PRINCESS

I am asking her life.

SHADOW (*he goes to the table. His tone becomes grave and gentle*)

The life which I must sometime take. Princess, I have known strong men to die for one another, for love. And lovers who have come to me gratefully so that they might not part . . . I tell you there *is* a love which casts out fear.

PRINCESS (*despairing*)

But she is so young!

SHADOW

I tell you to go with me now, in love, would be triumph, not death, as it is known to you.

PRINCESS (*turning*)

Oh in God's name . . . Lambert?

DUKE (*grave and desperate*)

Your Highness, you came to this house asking to be received as a mortal. We accepted you, and so far as it was in our power we tried to make you happy.

SHADOW

Yes.

DUKE

There is a code, sir, which holds among men which requires that one shall not violate good faith. I ask you, sir, to respect that code. (*The* SHADOW *goes quickly and confronts him.*) I am speaking of Grazia. She has disappeared. You are going. What are you going to do?

CORRADO (*wildly*)

Give her back to me! . . . Give her back to me!

SHADOW (*deeply*)

One lover must always lose.

PRINCESS

Then give her back to me!

SHADOW

And parents are left for love!

DUKE

But not like this! Not in Death's visible hand.

SHADOW (*after a pause*)

There are worlds between us, and I cannot reach your minds. (*He pauses and speaks with a terrible intensity.*) You ask me to make this sacrifice as a man, when my desire is greater than a man could know. You ask me to give up love, when I long for love with a surpassing hunger. . . . You are in terror and I am in agony. (*He buries his face in his hands, then looks up.*) Why do men fear my coming? I do not see how they can bear their lives. Their courage is magnificent. I am proud to have worn the garment of this flesh.

DUKE

Your Highness, we are not answered. You have ten minutes more of life, and after that . . . What can you give Grazia?

SHADOW

Sleep perhaps, and the release of dreams. And beyond that . . . (*He pauses hopelessly.*) There are no words by which to tell you.

DUKE

But that is death to us . . . and to her.

SHADOW

A word you have been taught to fear. A symbol of the unknown. And because of that word you would keep her from me?

PRINCESS

Your Highness, because she is dear to us.

SHADOW

But even now she is not yours. The shadowy places of the imagination are her home. It is such a simple step from her world to mine.

DUKE (*desperately*)

But Grazia doesn't know who you are. Before you do this monstrous thing, won't you tell her and let her choose?

SHADOW

Ah! . . . (*He covers his face in his hand, suddenly.*) Even Grazia was born to fear this face. She would

die with me now, as Sirki. But to choose Death as a lover. . . . No . . . No . . . I will not!

DUKE (*imploringly*)

But you gave me your word. . . .

SHADOW (*ironically*)

My word . . . I remember. I said that no harm should come to this house.

DUKE

Or to the one you loved. . . .

SHADOW

But I am doing her no harm, if you only knew.

DUKE (*pressing his advantage*)

But you gave me your word!

SHADOW

And you think me bound by that?

DUKE

I do . . . as an honorable man would be bound.

SHADOW (*bitterly*)

Because I assumed your flesh, must I assume your weakness, too?

DUKE (*earnestly*)

Then pity our weakness. Be as generous as you are great. You came in search of human experience. Compassion, sir, is the highest emotion man can know. . . . I have seen compassion struggling in you. We have come to beg the life of Grazia.

[*There is a pause. The* SHADOW *broods a moment, then makes a gesture of resignation. His tone is ironical and bitter.*

SHADOW

So . . . Again I am caught by my own folly. I gave myself life, not knowing the force that is in life, nor the force that is in love. I gave myself life, and with it the little rules by which it is lived. And now, I, Death, must bow to life. (*He laughs with wild bitterness.*) What a sublime joke! . . . What a monstrous and bitter comedy! (*His laughter ceases. He speaks in a light, ironical tone.*) My dear Duke, you have all risked your lives for Grazia. I must not be outdone in courage.

[*The* SHADOW *turns, goes toward the garden and lifts his hand.*

PRINCESS (*trembling*)

Where is he going?

DUKE

To find Grazia.

PRINCESS (*half hysterical*)

Oh . . . what will he do? What will he do?

DUKE

Wait, Marie.

[*The* SHADOW *comes down slowly, taking his place again by the fireplace. He has become grave and aloof.*

SHADOW

She will come. She is out there, dreaming of something you would destroy for her.

CORRADO

You will give her back?

SHADOW

No. It is for you to call her back.

CORRADO

Oh, God!

PRINCESS (*wildly*)

Oh, what will he do? He won't take her away?

DUKE

Wait, Marie.

[*The* SHADOW *lifts his hand.*

SHADOW

She is coming. Save her, if you can.

[GRAZIA *appears in the rear window, walking as though in a dream.*

GRAZIA (*as though from a distance*)

Your Highness . . . did you call?

PRINCESS

Grazia! Grazia! Oh, darling . . . I've been so frightened! So frightened!

[GRAZIA *goes and stands facing the* SHADOW, *as though unaware of any one else.*

GRAZIA

Your Highness called?

PRINCESS

Where did you go? Oh Grazia . . . don't run away like that again . . . not in the night!

GRAZIA

But I was quite safe with him, Mother. I love to be with him. I must stay with him, always.

PRINCESS

But you can't go with Prince Sirki. You can't!

GRAZIA

Why, Mother?

PRINCESS

Because he's going far away . . . to a distant country. You couldn't live there.

GRAZIA

But I couldn't live here without him. I know he seems a little . . . terrifying to you; but I'm happy with him, and safe, and so contented. He's kind, Mother, and more tender than any one I've known; even more tender than you. I've found the happiness I've looked for so long.

PRINCESS (*moaning*)

Grazia! You don't know what you're saying.

[GRAZIA *shivers and looks about at the group.*

GRAZIA

Why are you all so strange? And why is it so dark? I wish you would be happy with me. I've found my love. There ought to be lights . . . and music . . .

PRINCESS

Grazia . . . don't. (*She touches her.*) Oh, you're trembling.

GRAZIA

I'm only a little cold, Mother. . . . Why are you suffering so?

[*The* PRINCESS *looks imploringly toward the* SHADOW.

PRINCESS

Save her!

SHADOW (*in resignation*)

Tell her what you will.

GRAZIA

But what is there to tell? Do you think there is anything I don't understand? I love His Highness, and I must go with him. . . .

DUKE (*desperately*)

Your Highness . . . *you* must!

GRAZIA

Say what you like. It will make no difference.

DUKE

For God's sake. . . . It is nearly midnight!

SHADOW

I know. (*He turns and slowly puts on his black cloak, his back to the audience. He speaks, as though to himself.*) So my mortal experience must have the usual ending. I, too, must have my parting.

[*He goes to her. His voice is austere in his renunciation. It is agony for him to speak.*

SHADOW

Grazia . . . I came to this house as a jest . . . and made love to you as a jest.

[GRAZIA *looks at him her smile unchanged.*

GRAZIA

You are trying to destroy my love . . . because they wish it. . . . It was not a jest.

SHADOW (*sharply*)

Grazia . . . don't smile so! It's true. (*He turns to the group.*) Some one tell her, quickly . . . while there's time. . . . Corrado, she is cold. Take her in your arms and give her warmth!

[CORRADO *goes to* GRAZIA. *He can hardly speak.*

CORRADO

Grazia! (*She doesn't look at him.*) Grazia . . . don't you hear me?

GRAZIA (*far away*)

Yes . . . I hear.

CORRADO

Won't you stay . . . with me?

GRAZIA

I can't Corrado. But I shall always love you.

CORRADO (*helplessly*)

Oh . . . Oh God!

[*He turns away.*

SHADOW

Princess . . . call her to you, or she's lost.

PRINCESS

Grazia, my darling . . . come back to me!
(*She looks at* GRAZIA, *who stands smiling at the* SHADOW, *then turns away, in helpless terror.*)
Oh . . . she's lost . . . she's lost . . .
[*There is a silence of tense fear. After a moment the* SHADOW *goes to her. His tone is full of pain.*

SHADOW

Listen, Grazia, while there is time. I mustn't take you with me. You must stay here, with those who love you. If you went with me you could never come back to them again. I am going far away, to a land that would be all strangeness and mystery to you . . . Grazia, do you hear?

GRAZIA

Yes, I hear.

SHADOW

Then . . . why don't you draw away?

GRAZIA

Why must you say these things to me? They can make no difference.

SHADOW (*desperately*)

You don't understand! . . . My holiday is over . . . I am going . . . at once.

GRAZIA

I am ready.

SHADOW

No . . . you can't go with me!

GRAZIA

Yes, I can. Shall we go now?

[*She goes closer to him, with a happy gesture, and takes his hand.*

SHADOW

But you don't know who I am!

GRAZIA

You are my love.

[*A slight pause then the* SHADOW *turns to the* DUKE.

SHADOW

You heard? Do you wish me to speak and destroy this . . . happiness?

DUKE (*unsteadily*)

You must!

SHADOW (*with a gesture of longing and tenderness*) Grazia, my little love, it was not a jest! (*He turns slowly and stands before the Lamp of Illusion, then makes a sudden movement of his arms and the Lamp goes out. In the brief darkness he covers his head with the hood of his cloak and mounts the stairs, where the green light strikes his face which is now the mask of death.*) Goodbye, my friends. Remember that there is only a moment of shadow between your life and mine. And when I call, come bravely through that shadow, and you shall find me only your familiar friend. (*He makes a gesture of fare-*

well to GRAZIA.) Goodbye, Grazia. Now you see me as I am.

GRAZIA (*her smile unchanged*)

But I have always seen you like that. You are not changed.

SHADOW (*in astonishment*)

You have seen me like this!

[GRAZIA *goes and stands at the foot of the steps.*

GRAZIA

Yes. You seem beautiful to me.

[*She mounts the steps and stands beside him.*

SHADOW (*triumphantly*)

Then there *is* a love which casts out fear, and I have found it. (*A chime of bells begins, and the leaves begin to fall.*) And love is greater than illusion, and as strong as death!

[*He stands with his arm about her, as the leaves fall and the bells peal. At the stroke of twelve there is a sudden and complete darkness.*

CURTAIN